

# **“Foreign affairs of the Republic of Moldova: Does Moldova’s Eastern orientation inhibit its European aspirations?”**

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ASSMR – Autonomous Soviet Socialist Moldova Republic

CEEC – Central-Eastern European countries

CIS – Commonwealth of Independent States

CoE – Council of Europe

EBRD – European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

ECHR – European Court of Human Rights

EU – European Union

ICG – International Crisis Group

IPP – Institute for Public Policy

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NIS – Newly Independent States

OSCE – Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe

PCA – Partnership and Cooperation Agreement

PHARE – Poland Hungary Assistant for Economic Reconstruction

SECI – South East European Cooperation Initiative

SPSEE – Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe

TACIS – Technical Assistance for Commonwealth of Independent States

UNDP – United Nations Development Program

WTO – World Trade Organization

## INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Moldova is a young state, created along with the other Newly Independent States (NIS) in 1991 after the implosion of the Soviet Union. After the Baltic States, on 24<sup>th</sup> August 1991, the Ukrainian parliament adopted the independence declaration, followed on 25<sup>th</sup> by Belarus. On 27<sup>th</sup> August, the “sovereign, independent, democratic and free” Republic of Moldova was proclaimed. Many Moldovans considered that the act of independence was the first step towards the re-unification with Romania, the *mother country* of a territory subject of centurial foreign occupation and clashes of cultures and history. However, the prospect of return to Romania was soon turn down because of numerous reasons (the most important being the confused and weak national identity of a population that underwent decades of Russification under the rule of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union) and Moldovan authorities engaged in the complicated task of building the state of the newly proclaimed republic.

Foreign affairs were a domain of special importance for the new leadership in Chişinău since the Republic of Moldova sought international recognition and support of the external community, as well as the membership of various regional, continental and transatlantic organisations. However, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs established in the aftermath of Moldova’s declaration of independence inherited the institutional and conceptual weaknesses of its Soviet predecessor and failed to define explicitly the foreign priorities of the country, unlike the Baltic States that declared immediately the membership of the European Union and NATO to be their primary foreign-policy objective (Leancă, 2002). In contrast, Moldovan leaders opted for a multidimensional character of foreign affairs, i.e. of balancing between East and West.

More importantly, the Republic of Moldova has hesitated in making a clear choice regarding its European orientation and has signed up to the programs of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) at the Alma-Ata conference, which put an end to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The CIS was perceived as a solution to Moldova’s economic problems appeared as a consequence of dismantling of the Soviet block. Yet, Moldova is facing serious problems at the moment, both on the political and economic levels, while the transition process hit seriously its population. Compared to the former Soviet Baltic republics, reforms in certain sectors have failed and the integration into European organizations is far from coming true.

The applications of East-Central European countries and the Baltic States have been approved at the Copenhagen summit in late 2002, with Romania and Bulgaria being already at the doors of the European Union. This way, it became crystal clear that Moldova, along with its neighbouring Ukraine and Belarus, is going to be excluded for a foreseeable future from the process of eastward enlargement of the European Union.

Since independence, Moldova's leadership, as well as its population, have been divided between those who pledged to withdraw from the CIS, as a pre-condition to Moldova's European Integration, and those who were in favour of preserving closer links with the Russian Federation and the CIS group of countries. A large part of politicians and diplomats in Chişinău embraced the idea of compatibility between Moldova's simultaneous integration within Eastern and Western systems to the extent of the „perfect” suitability of the CIS membership and eventual quality EU member state. Nevertheless, the European Union has recently turned upside down this assumption through the voice of the Chairman of the Joint Parliamentary Cooperation Committee EU-Moldova, Jan Marinus Wiersma, who stated that Moldova will have to choose between the CIS or the EU, in the case of a deeper European integration (BBC, 2003).

What role was played by the lack of political will and its double-faced foreign policy in slowing Moldova down on its journey “back to Europe”? To what extent did Russia's political influence and economic pressure thwart Moldova's efforts to become member of the European Union? Does Moldova's Eastern orientation, especially its CIS membership, inhibit its European aspirations? These are the **questions** that I want to address in the present paper.

The first chapter will present a historic framework of the territory on which the state the Republic of Moldova has been established since such an exercise will facilitate a better understanding of the developments in the country after its proclamation of independence and will place in a better defined context the dimensions of its foreign-policy. The second major part of the work will examine the Eastern vector of Moldova's foreign affairs, i.e. the relations with Russia Federation and Ukraine (as far as its implication in the decade frozen secessionist conflict is concerned), the quality of the member state of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Transnistrian issue. The third chapter will study the Western orientation of Moldova, a special emphasis being placed on its relations with Romania and the EU as such. How the simultaneous movement towards East and

West have influenced each other and determined Moldova's current place on the map of the New Europe forms the last part of my research. The primary focus will be on analysis of high-level orientations in Moldova and its diplomacy, other economic, social, military or cultural factors being only raised, but not studied in depth.

My **hypothesis** is that concomitant integration into the CIS and the EU is a contradiction in terms given the different set of values, aims and regulations existing in both regions. Accordingly, the Eastern course hampered Moldova's efforts to become a member of the Union and a viable partner in other Occident structures, and inhibited its European aspirations so far.

The **methodology** that I will use during my research will be analytical and comparative, based on the examples of Baltic countries – former Soviet republics and successful candidates in the EU and NATO accession. I will also study the role played by political leaders and their weak identity in identifying a strategic direction of Moldova on the external level.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union constitutes a recent event of the modern history; that is why there is a lack of consistent literature concerning the situation and developments of former Soviet republics, Moldova counting among them. While the East-Central European countries enjoyed considerable attention and constant preoccupation from the side of the European academic and research circles, the study on Moldova has been rather sporadic and limited. There are few studies regarding Moldova's foreign affairs and even less are examining the outcome of its participation into the CIS policies. Thus, the assessment of efficiency of the Eastern trend as an obstacle to the European one is necessary, but complicated at the same time. Therefore, the **key literature** for my research will be the following primary sources: acts adopted by the leadership of Moldova and its statements in respect to the foreign-policy of the country; documents adopted by the European Union and other European organizations concerning Moldova; periodicals, newspapers, news agencies and opinion polls; interviews with officials, foreign-policy makers, political analysts and researchers in Moldova, as well as in the United Kingdom. I will also take a closer look at Russia's statements, documents and newspapers on the same subject. The secondary sources for my MA work will include primarily books and studies on Moldova, Russia's foreign affairs and the EU enlargement to the East. In addition, I will use the knowledge that I have gained in my capacity of researcher in Moldova in the last four years. I have systematically surveyed the available sources in English, Romanian and Russian regarding the topic of the present paper, which

aims to contribute to this field of study, especially that there is too little academic work on this subject and no similar hypothesis has been formulated.

## CHAPTER I. HISTORIC REFERENCES



It is not easy to present the Republic of Moldova from a historic perspective both to a wider public and a specialist reader since it has a complex and complicated history, which is still disputable and lags far away from a consensus between the implicated parts. Republic of Moldova is a young state – it was created in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union on the base of the Soviet Socialistic Republic with the same name - but references regarding its historic territories and inhabitants can be traced back to the space of Carpathian Mountains and Danube river, while the *founding myths* go back to the wars of 101-102 and 105-106 between the Romans and Dacians, both of the parts constituting the origins of Romanians.

Moldova is the second Romanian state that was created. The first one, Țara Românească (Romanian country), was settled down in 1330 after the famous victory

at Posada of Basarab voivode over the Hungarian King, Carol Robert de Anjou<sup>1</sup>. Moldova appeared in the middle of the same century as a principality after the defensive campaign against the Tatars in the eastern part of Carpathian Mountains led by Dragoș prince. This came to be considered the foundation stone of the Principality of Moldova, known as “Descălecatul lui Dragoș” (The settling down of Dragoș). Soon after his establishment he was overthrown by his rivals, the Bogdan’s family, which is named by the modern historiography the “Dynasty of Mușatini” after the name of a women, Margareta-Mușata. The dynasty set up the heart of the principality around the Moldova River. Initially, the Principality of Moldova was the vassal of the Hungarian Kingdom<sup>2</sup>. However, during 1364-1365, the Hungarian King was forced to recognize the independency of the second Romanian state with its capital in Baia, due to international constraints and local resurgent.

The Principality of Moldova strengthened considerably its positions once the territorial completion was finished under Roman I (1392-1394), which proclaimed himself “the ruler of Moldova country from the Mountain to the Sea”. Documents revealed that Tatars were drove away over the Nistru River by Moldovan voivodes during 1391-1399, which set up here the Hotin, Soroca and Tighina fortresses. Moldova was bordering Țara Românească on the Milcov River and controlled the flowering Genovese fortress Moncastro (Cetatea Albă) that had its borders on the Nistru liman<sup>3</sup>. Under the command of voivode Alexandru cel Bun (1400-1432), Moldova went through an important political and ecclesiastic organization. His long rule was characterized by stability, cultural and political achievements, and a skilful foreign policy balanced between Hungary and Poland. Moldova of Alexandru cel Bun won the control of another thriving Genovese fortress, Chilia. In order to oversee and secure the commercial roads that linked the south of Poland to the Danube River’s apertures (Cetatea Albă and Chilia fortresses) from Hungarian attacks, Alexandru cel Bun recognized the suzerainty of the Polish ruler, Vladislav Iajello. But, once with the agreement signed between Poland and Hungary in 1412, Moldova faced its first division of foreign spheres of influence. However, the agreement was not fulfilled due

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<sup>1</sup> This is one of the key-dates of the History of Romanians. Boia, L. “România. Țară de frontieră a Europei” (România. Borderland of Europe), p.56, Humanitas, 2002

<sup>2</sup> In order to maintain a relative freedom, Moldova’s voivodes accept either to be vassals of the Hungarian King or to become vassals of another king, the rival of the Hungarian one, i.e. Poland’s King. Djuvara, N. “O scurtă istorie a românilor povestită celor tineri” (A short history of Romanians told to the young), p. 58, Humanitas, 2002

<sup>3</sup> Lazarescu, D. A. “În ce chip și de câte ori a pierdut poporul român Basarabia” (How and for how many times did the Romanian people lose Basarabia), România Liberă, 2002



to constant fights between Polish and Hungarian Kings, and also because Moldovan voivode has always honoured its obligations in the front of the Polish ruler.

The following century has marked the apogee of the medieval Moldova, under the authority of the most important voivode of this period, Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. His domination (1457-1504), the longest one in the principality's history, was marked by constant battles with the Ottoman Empire. Turks had started their expansion in Balkans in the middle of fourteenth century. By the end of the century, Ottomans reached the Danube River, on the border of the Romanian country (Țara Românească). Once with conquer of Constantinople in 1453, the Christians lost irreversibly their influence in Balkans.

The three Romanian states (Țara Românească, Moldova and Transylvania) were situated in the first line of the Turkish expansion. By the end of 1418, Țara Românească had to accept the Ottoman suzerainty and pay tribute to it, loosing its access to the North Sea. In Moldova, resistance against Turks lasted up to 1547, when, after more than thirty/forty battles with Ottomans, Ștefan cel Mare had to give up and pay tribute, loosing Cetatea Albă and Chilia fortresses, and also the south of Moldova. So Romanians had no more exit to the sea. The loss of the two fortresses brought in serious problems for the economy of Moldova, which was deprived from the main important sources of its development – transit trade and reach markets.

In 1600, as a result of the fights between boyars for the throne, the ruler of Transylvania and Țara Românească, Mihai Viteazul, installed its power in Moldova. It was for the first time when the three Romanian states were united under the same sceptre<sup>4</sup>. Although the “unification” did not last long, Moldova and Țara Românească were getting even more closer: they had similar institutions, the language spoken on their territories was basically identical and cultural links became stronger. The idea of common origins was a constant feature of historic writing in both countries. Even their relationship to the Ottoman Empire was similar – both were dependent on it. Romanian countries were later on totally included in the political, military and economic Ottoman system. Turks started to do away with Romanian rulers, i.e. to name and remove them. By the eighteen century, they became already simply Ottoman servants and their title was equivalent to that of *pasha*, thus of second category, not even the first one (Boia, L. 2002). Nevertheless, the Romanian countries never lost their autonomy - they kept their own institutions, they had their

own law and customs, the local leadership and aristocracy were not destroyed - and there was not a Turkish colonialism. Meanwhile, the Russian Empire began its expansion to the southeastern Europe. Petru the Great (1683-1725) aimed to reach Constantinople after its fall and defeat the Ottoman Empire. In his way to Constantinople, Petru I had to cross Romanian countries, which became a battlefield between Turks and Russians in the eighteen and nineteen centuries. The Russian Empire failed in its ambitions and did not succeed to fight the Turks. However, in May 1812, it annexed Moldova's territory between the Prut and Nistru<sup>5</sup> and the southern part of Moldova, while the Austro-Hungarians occupied the northern part of Moldova, Bucovina, in 1775.

In their attempt to fight and resist the Russian and Austria-Hungarian power, by seeking the support of another foreign power, Romanians have oriented towards France. Even after the collapse of Napoleon, France remained to be the best ally of Romanian countries, due to the cultural relationship between them: both of the languages belong to the Latin/Romantic family. A period of exceptional French influence sprang up in the nineteenth century (even up to the middle of the twenty century) in the whole Romanian society, in which all intellectuals became soon fluent in French. It is not surprisingly, thus, that Romanian students in France were so enthusiastic about the changes that occurred in the French society, as well as in the whole Europe during 1815-1848, after the fall of Napoleon Bonaparte. These students were the ones who tried to organize an insurrection in Moldova, but the coup was hunt out and the revolution ended before it even began. However, in Țara Românească, the radical youth managed to organise the masses that reached Bucharest and asked for the abolition of nobility and convocation of new elections. The voivode resigned and left the country, and a new government was installed in power here, which initiated radical changes, such as the liberation of gypsies. Another ideal of the revolutionary forces was the *Unification of Principalities*, although it was not admitted officially, given the fear of Russian and Ottoman attacks, which were not long in coming.

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<sup>4</sup> On the coins it was said: "Mihai Viteazul – Voivode of Muntenia (Țara Românească – n. a.), Transylvania and Moldova". Djuvara, N. "O scurtă istorie a românilor povestită celor tineri" (A short history of Romanians told to the young), p. 115, Humanitas, 2002

<sup>5</sup> This territory was named Basarabia in the Russian Empire. In the Medieval Ages this was the name of the southern part of Moldova. Djuvara, N. "O scurtă istorie a românilor povestită celor tineri" (A short history of Romanians told to the young), p. 149, Humanitas, 2002

Russians and Ottomans could not admit all these changes and, for the first time, they agreed to enter together the Romanian country – Russians in the northern part and Turks in the south. The revolution was put down in autumn of 1848 and the country was divided in two. Even Bucharest was cut in two parts, the way Berlin was after the Second World War (Djuvara, N., 2002). It was the end of the revolution, but not of the ideals that encouraged it! (Boia, L., 2002) During their exile to Paris and London, the Romanian leaders of the revolution undertook a very efficient and consequent lobby in favour of the unification of Principalities. Thus, in 1854, France (Napoleon III), Britain (Queen Victoria), Piedmont (the base of the future Italian Kingdom) attacked Russians on their territory, in Crimea, in coalition with Turks. Nor Moldovans, nor Muntenias (of Țara Românească – n. a.) did accept the annexation of Basarabia in 1812. The boyars and intellectuals from Moldova and Țara Românească reacted painfully at the denationalisation and Russification policy of Romanian basarabians.<sup>6</sup> Being decided to take advantages out of the international conjuncture after the Crimea was (1853-1856) in order to regain the annexed territory in 1812, the leaders of the National movement from the Principality of Moldova and Țara Românească addresses dozens of memos to the Big Powers, asking their support for the Unification of the two principalities under foreign rule in order to obstruct Russian influence in Southern part of the Danube River by returning to Moldova the territory between Prut and Nistru Rivers. Lord John Russell, former British prime minister and Foreign Affairs minister has sustained this proposal.<sup>7</sup> However, it was impossible to achieve this goal due to the fact that in the view of Napoleon III Austrian Empire, and not Russia, was France's main enemy. He chose to support Russian in order to gain their neutrality in case of an eventual war with Austrians. As a result of the Congress of Peace in Paris (1856), Russian Emperor lost its protector status and the south of Basarabia was given back to Moldova<sup>8</sup>, in order to prevent Russian access to the sea (not for the sake of Moldova's reintegration!) Moreover, Moldova's territory between Prut and Nistru Rivers, Basarabia, which was annexed in 1812 by Russians, continued to be incorporated into the Empire.

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<sup>6</sup> Hitchins, K., "The Romanians. 1774-1866", Oxford University Press, p. 349, 1996

<sup>7</sup> Schroeder, P. W., "Austria, Great Britain and the Crimean War. The destruction of the European Concert", London, Ithaca, p. 203-204, 338, 360, 1972

<sup>8</sup> Under these circumstances, Russia returned just a small part of Basarabia, namely districts of Bolgrad, Cahul and Ismail. Vernon John Puryear, "England, Russia and the Straits Question 1844-1856", California, Berkeley, p. 415-433 1831

The big European powers, France and Britain especially, allowed a certain degree of unification of Țara Românească and Moldova, but as *United Principalities* and not *Romania*, as it was required. Also, each principality had to have its own ruler, government, parliament and army. These conditions were not negotiable, but obviously, they did not satisfy the expectations of the Romanian leaders, which found a simple and genius solution: on 5 January 1859 the elective assembly of Moldova, in Iași, voted for colonel Alexandru Ioan Cuza and, a little bit later, on 24 January, in Bucharest the same person was elected ruler of Romanian country. The convention of Paris did not say that the same person could not be the ruler of both principalities! Three years later, a single government was established in Bucharest that, starting that moment, became the capital of the newly declared Romania.

Meanwhile, the annexed part of Moldova in 1812 was following its own way – the Russian one. The region had between 240.000 and 350.000 inhabitants, the majority of which were Romanians and spoke Romanian. Total surface of the attached territory was around 45 630 km, 7400 more than what it was left to the rest of Principality of Moldova in 1812 (King, Ch., 2002). In the first decade of its annexation, Basarabia had the highest degree of autonomy given to a province in the whole Russian Empire<sup>9</sup>. In February 1828, two months before the eruption of the Russian-Turkish war, Tsar Nicolas I ordered the liquidation of Basarabia's autonomy. Starting this moment, the denationalisation and Russification policy towards Romanian basarabians considerably increased, Basarabia being transformed gradually into a normal Russian province.<sup>10</sup>

In the light of the Russian state centralisation and because of the highly corrupted and greedy local nobility, Basarabia's autonomy was diminished and a process of denationalisation of the local elites emerged. Soon, petty Jewish bourgeois<sup>11</sup> and Russian bureaucrats formed the urban elite, while peasants were mostly of Romanian origins. The suppression of the use of Romanian language in schools and public affairs after 1822 was another imperial measure that aimed the

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<sup>9</sup> Until 1817, the province was exempted from the payment of certain taxes. Romanian language was used along the Russian language in administration and justice, while in tribunals Romanian was the favourite one. The old administration and local legislation remained valid until 1918 when Tsar Alexander signed the status that confirmed the federal relation between Basarabia and Russian Empire. Livezeanu, I. "Cultură și naționalism în România Mare. 1918-1930" (Culture and nationalism in Great Romania. 1918-1930), p. 117, Humanitas, 1998

<sup>10</sup> Jewsbury, G. F., "The Russian Annexation of Bassarabia: A Study of Imperial Expansion. 1774-1828", Columbia University Press, New York, 1976

<sup>11</sup> Over 50.000 Jews were living in Chișinău in 1897, accounting for half of the population; almost all factories in the town were in Jews' hands and, by the end of the century, sixteen Jewish schools were

instalment of Russian authority over Romanians in Basarabia. In 1867, there was not a single Romanian school in the region. However this did not affect the identity of a large part of Moldovan/Romanian peasants, since a vast majority of them was illiterate. In 1897, 15,6% of the whole population of Basarabia could read (Livezeanu, I., 2002). The same thing could not be said about the local elite, which was extremely Russified, because of its education in imperial universities, such as Odessa, Kiev, Moscow and St. Petersburg. The linguistic and cultural Russification of Basarabian elite and the predominant indifference among peasants made the spread of nationalistic feelings impossible here. Thus, Basarabia stayed outside the movement of pan-Romanian unification that sprang out in Romania after the unification of 1859. The first signs of national awakening and liberation were remarked with the occasion of the Russian revolution in 1905, but it was followed shortly by a reaction and it was severely limited. During the First World War the pan-Romanian nationalism was totally imported in Basarabia from Romania and Transylvania<sup>12</sup>, while Basarabians were fully caught in the *social* Revolution of 1917 (Livezeanu, I., 2002).

The threat of the annexation by the new independent Ukraine and the fear of the inclusion in the civil Russian war, determined a congress of soldiers held in Chişinău to call for the autonomy of Basarabia within the Russian state. Later on, a temporary government, Sfatul Țării, proclaimed the Democratic Moldovan Republic on 2 December 1917. In order to stop the Bolshevik expansion to the region, Sfatul Țării asked the help of the Romanian army. On 24 January 1918, soon after the arrival of the Romanian troops, the independency of the Moldovan Republic was declared. On 9 April, Sfatul Țării voted for the maintenance of a semi autonomy and conditional unification with Romania. In May 1918 Romania signed the peace with Central Powers that foresaw the return of Basarabia and its unification with its *mother country*, while the Central Powers acquired the total economic control over Romania<sup>13</sup>. The unification process has completed on 27 November 1918, when Sfatul Țării cancelled its previous conditions and auto dissolved.

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operating in Chişinău. King, Ch., "Moldovenii. România, Rusia şi politica culturală" (The Moldovans. Romania, Russia and cultural policy), p.23, Arc, 2002

<sup>12</sup> Onisifor Ghibu, a Transylvanian writer and teacher, came to discover that it was less a problem of awakening of a lost identity, but more an attempt to build a new identity starting from zero. King, Ch., "Moldovenii. România, Rusia şi politica culturală" (The Moldovans. Romania, Russia and cultural policy), p.31, Arc, 2002

<sup>13</sup> The territorial acquisition of Basarabia is the only acquisition of Romania Kingdom that was never guaranteed by an international treaty. King, Ch., "Moldovenii. România, Rusia şi politica culturală" (The Moldovans. Romania, Russia and cultural policy), p.37, Arc, 2002

The big part of Basarabia's population has welcomed the Unification with Romania. As a result of the agrarian reform, peasants were given land. A real revolution in education occurred. In a short period of time - twenty-two years – hundreds of thousands of young and old Basarabians had the possibility to learn. Before the Unification, the percentage of those who could not read was very high and accounted around ninety per cent, compared to seventy per cent of Germans and fifty per cent in the case of Russians from Basarabia. By the end of 1930s, over fifty percent of Romanian basarabians knew how to read. In contrast to the Tsarist Basarabia, the studies now were done in Romanian language, i.e. the mother tongue of the majority of population was used.

There were some categories of population that had a hostile attitude towards the Romanian administration. These animosities were nourished by the rigidity of the rulers in respect to those who infringed the public order. Such an attitude was also determined by the subversive actions undertaken in Basarabia by the special agents of the Soviet Russia's secret police and Comintern.

The Soviet Union never accepted the loss of Basarabia and it was always seeking ways to hinder the integration of Basarabians into Romanian Kingdom. In this respect, an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Moldovan Republic (ASSMR) was created on the eastern border of Great Romania in October 1924. Although it was named Moldovan, the majority of the ASSMR population was of Ukrainian origins<sup>14</sup>. The creation of ASSMR was a deliberate step, since it represented a tool for Soviet Unions' political pressure on Bucharest when negotiating Basarabia's status. ASSMR was conceived as a tool for the export of revolution in Romania and Balkans. This Soviet imminence did not have anything in common with the national and ethnic nature of the republic. Romanians formed an ethnic minority, the majority being of Ukrainian origins. Hence, it is obvious that it was an artificial title.

Despite the normalization of the relationship between Bucharest and Moscow in 1930s, no agreement regarding the status of the disputed province was signed. Moreover, as a consequence of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Non-Aggression Pact of 23 August 1939, Basarabia was annexed by the Soviet Union on 28 June 1940. Already on 2 August 1940, the Soviet Socialist Moldovan Republic was established, more or less on the historic territory of Basarabia. Measures were immediately taken to create a separate Moldavian nation, different from Romania, given the danger that a new

Romanian government could claim the annexed territory back on ethnic grounds. An „artificial“ dialect was introduced between Moldavian and Romanian, based on archaic Romanian and imported Russian vocabulary, written in Cyrillic script. Linguistic assimilation was a step on the way to ethnic assimilation - if you spoke a language as mother tongue you were likely to regard yourself as belonging to the nation associated with that language (Ben Fowkes, 1997). Also, Stalin proceeded with a policy of annihilation of the Romanian identity through mass deportations to Siberia of the „nation’s enemies“ - priests, teachers, kulaks - all of them forming the intelligentsia of the Moldovan Soviet republic<sup>15</sup>. Having destroyed the Romanian intellectual elites in Basarabia, the leadership of the Soviet Union replaced them with Russian speakers brought in from other republics - a new socialist intelligentsia, obedient to the Kremlin.

It is not surprisingly, thus, that by 1991, when Moldova became independent after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it could not count on a clear national identity, given its multi-ethnic population and a fifty year-period in which all the aspects of Romanian identity were suppressed. Also, in the light of the complicated history of the region and its constant falsification, as an important way for the Soviet authorities to control the consciousness of the non-Russian nationalities of the periphery, it is not hard to understand why history is still a disputable ground and constitutes a constant feature of both the foreign and domestic politics of the Republic of Moldova.

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<sup>14</sup> 49% of the population were Ukrainians, while only one third of the population were Moldovans. King, Ch., „Moldovenii. România, Rusia și politica culturală” (The Moldovans. Romania, Russia and cultural policy), p.52, Arc, 2002

## CHAPTER II. THE EASTERN VECTOR OF MOLDOVA'S FOREIGN AFFAIRS

### *Russian Federation - The Big Brother*

On 27 August 1991, after the failed coup in Moscow, the “sovereign, independent, democratic and free”<sup>15</sup> Republic of Moldova was proclaimed. The population of the new state comprised 4 335 733 people, of which two-thirds (64, 3%) are Moldovans of Romanian descent and Romanian speakers. Due to Stalinization, Moldova has a massive non-Romanian minority of 35, 7% - the largest groups being Ukrainian (584 196, 13,8%) and Russian (540 900, 13%).<sup>17</sup>

Romania was the first country that recognised Moldova's independence one hour after its proclamation, being followed by Georgia on the same day. However, the process of fully-fledged international recognition was rather difficult: the Occident powers were willing to acknowledge Moldova's independence only after a Moscow decision in this respect.<sup>18</sup> A period of confusion emerged up until the end of 1991, when the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics ceased to exist as a result of the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) on 21 December 1991 at the Alma-Ata conference.<sup>19</sup> Moscow accepted to establish diplomatic relations with the independent state Moldova, only after its promise to adhere to the CIS programs

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<sup>15</sup> According to the archive data, the victims of the three waves of deportations and political repressions in Basarabia accounts to 885 000. BBC World Service, Romanian Section, 13 June 2001

<sup>16</sup> Declaration of Independence, 1991

<sup>17</sup> Census of 1989, Vasile Nedelciuc, Republic of Moldova, Chişinău, The Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, 1992

<sup>18</sup> Iurie Leancă, Former First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, interview with the author, Chişinău, 3 July 2002

<sup>19</sup> Baltic States did not take up the invitation by the Russian Federation to join CIS, as “they do not wish to form part of a post-Soviet Russian led community, which could constrain their freedom to form their own foreign-policy orientation.” Conflict Studies Research Centre, “Russia and the Near Abroad”, Dr M. A. Smith, March 1997



and policies. The recognition by the Occident powers followed shortly: Moldova became a member of the United Nations Organization on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1992.

Since its first hours of independence, Moldova was dependent on Russia, because of powerful political factors (an influential minority, politically and economically active)<sup>20 21</sup>, cultural elements (the dominant role played by the Russian language and culture in the Soviet Union and afterwards)<sup>22</sup>, economic links (import/export trade and dependency on gas and electricity imports from Russia)<sup>23</sup> and military reasons (the illegal presence of Russian troops on Moldova's territory since 1992 until this moment),<sup>24</sup> which still keep Moldova deep in the Russian sphere of influence. All these factors were largely used by Moscow diplomacy that declared the relationship with former soviet space a priority of Russia's foreign affairs, including its relations with Moldova. This was later on stressed in the "Near Abroad" concept that implied, on one hand, a practice of different principles and rules in respect to former Soviet republics, and, on the other hand, it was a signal for the rest of the power centres that this region was an exclusive sphere of Russian influence.<sup>25</sup>

The Moldovan-Russian Treaty of Partnership was another delicate and hard issue of the relationship between the two states. The first official relations were established long before the disintegration of the Soviet Union, on 22 September 1990 in Moscow, with the conclusion of the Treaty regarding the interstate relations between the Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova and the Soviet Socialist Federative Republic of Russia. This document had a positive influence over the process of Moldova's sovereignty consolidation. However, Russian Federation did not honour its engagement to ratify the Treaty, as did the Moldovan part eight days after the treaty's

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<sup>20</sup> Although numerically the Russian minority is only on the second place in Moldova, members of this community posed most challenges to the Moldovan authorities after independence...having organized the movement "Interfront" at the end of 80's, which advocated for the preservation of the Soviet Union and special social status. "The EU & Moldova", Federal Trust for Education and Research, 2004

<sup>21</sup> The issue of the Russian community (a minority of 13% in Moldova) is important as it forms a card to be played by Moscow to remind Moldova that Russia is sensitive to the direction of its foreign policy orientation. Conflict Studies Research Centre, "Russia and the Near Abroad", Dr M. A. Smith, March 1997

<sup>22</sup> Nowadays Russian is by far the dominant language in the Moldovan media...the superior power of attraction by the media from Russia, beefed up with stronger financial muscle as opposed to Romania, makes competition between the two languages a fairly unequal one. "The EU & Moldova", Federal Trust for Education and Research, 2004

<sup>23</sup> Since Vladimir Putin came to power as the president of the Russian Federation, energy dependence and trade ties became two important factors of Russia's relations with the former soviet states, including Moldova. Conflict Studies Research Centre, "Russian Foreign Policy 2000: The Near Abroad", Dr M. A. Smith, December 2000

<sup>24</sup> Russian First Vice-Minister, Veaceslav Trubnikov, declared during his visit to Chişinău that the withdrawal of Russian troops and munitions would be possible only after the settling of the Transnistria conflict. 26 November, 2002, [www.azi.md](http://www.azi.md)

conclusion.<sup>26</sup> Five years later, in Alma-Ata, an Additional Protocol to the treaty was signed up, in order to bring the document up to date and ease its implementation. In contrast to the first document that was appreciated as favourable to Moldova, the later was considered a regrettable mistake of the leadership in Chişinău, since it stated that, if necessary, the both parts would help each other in repelling aggression against one or both parts. Being compared to the Soviet-Finish Treaty of 1949, this article offered to Russia a perfect legitimate frame for further political interference in Moldova's domestic politics. Fortunately, the Russian Parliament did not ratify this Additional Protocol, as well. Given this, but moreover, because of the dangers carried out by the protocol, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Moldova pledged for the negotiation of a new Treaty and abandon of the old text. This way, in 1998 talks over a new treaty were launched. Relatively quickly the experts came up with a balanced text that did reflect the interest of both parts. However, the anticipated parliamentary elections convoked in Moldova just before the conclusion of the treaty (February 2001), have brought significant changes in the political life, once with the overwhelming victory of Communists' Party. Being obedient to the Kremlin, the new leadership in Chişinău had accepted Moscow's new claims, i.e. to include in the preamble of the treaty references to Russia's quality of guarantor-state in the process of the political settlement of Transnistrian conflict. Thus, this new element introduced in the last minute of negotiations, created an unbalanced situation, since the same roles, as guarantors, of the OSCE and Ukraine have not been confirmed in documents that would carry the same political and judicial weight as the Treaty does. Moreover, since there is no single document regarding the notion of the "guarantor-state", its prerogatives and the time limits for its activities, a feeling of uncertainty and insecurity will hover over Moldova's foreign policy, both in the medium and long term. Also, the treaty, which has been harshly criticized by the opposition<sup>27</sup>, defines as strategic and privileged the relationship between Russia and Moldova.

After the break-up of the Soviet Union, the territory between Prut and Nistru Rivers found itself in a new geopolitical situation over the last 300 centuries – Russia

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<sup>25</sup> Iurie Leancă, "The Evolution of Foreign Policy", Transition: Retrospectives and Perspectives, Chişinău, 2002

<sup>26</sup> During 1990-1999 Russia refused to ratify the treaty because the document did not reflect the interests of the secessionist region of Transnistria and those of the Russian minority from Moldova. BBC World Service, Romanian Section, [www.bbc.co.uk/romanian](http://www.bbc.co.uk/romanian), 19 November 2001

<sup>27</sup> According to the opposition, the treaty has in view Moldova's unlimited anchorage in the Russia's sphere of influence. BBC World Service, Romanian Section, [www.bbc.co.uk/romanian](http://www.bbc.co.uk/romanian), 19 November 2001

was no longer its big bordering neighbour. However, it will take a long time until the both parts will treat each other as equal partners and get over the stereotypes of the past and characteristic complexes of their previous status - a complex of superiority in Russia's case, due to its imperial existence and a central position in the Soviet Union, and an inferiority complex in Moldova's condition, that was for more than 100 years a province of the Russian Empire and, later on (1940-1991), a periphery republic of the Soviet Union. Moreover, as the history of Empires revealed, the former centres of power tried to maintain their dominant positions, but through other means, more subtle and sophisticated, but which still make possible the influence and even interference in the affairs of former dependants. This scenario was operated, to a large extent, by the Russian Federation in Moldova after its independence.

*Commonwealth of Independent State: Russia as the hub, the rest as the spokes*

On 8 December 1991, the Republics of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine concluded in Minsk the Convention of Creation of the CIS and put an end, this way, to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as a subject of the international law and a geopolitical block. The Republic of Moldova adhered to the CIS on 21 December when its first president, Mircea Snegur, signed the Additional Protocol to the Convention at Alma-Ata with the further mention that Moldova would not be part of the political-military component, because of its status of neutrality.<sup>28</sup>

According to the Status of the CIS<sup>29</sup>, the Community is not a State and does not possess supranational prerogatives<sup>30</sup>, but it aims at interstate integration. It recognizes the sovereignty of all its members, which are independent subjects, equal in rights before the international law, as well as their right to self-determination, their state frontiers and territorial integrity, and the renunciation to the illegal seizure of territories. The community does not allow the reciprocal interference into domestic and foreign affairs of any member state and pledges for peaceful solutions in case of

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<sup>28</sup> Moldova will refuse to create any political union within the CIS and will only plead for economic cooperation, because the broken ties between economic entities have repercussions on people's living level and this would make the situation unstable. President Mircea Snegur, BASA-press, [www.basa.md](http://www.basa.md), 19 February 1994

<sup>29</sup> International Treaties a part of which is the Republic of Moldova, p. 241, vol. 16, Moldpres, Official Monitor of the Republic of Moldova, Chişinău, 1999

<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, article 25, chapter VI of the Agreement of Economic Union, states: "If the present Treaty institutes different norms and rules to the national legislation, the rules and the norms of the

disputes among its members. However, the member states have the right to engage in “measures that aim the suppression of a danger that might occur in respect to the sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of a member state of the commonwealth.” Article 12, section III of the CIS Status asserts that, if necessary, a common use of the Army Forces might be put into action, in regard to the self and collective defence. The CIS looks mainly for political, economic, cultural, judicial, humanitarian and health cooperation. Among its common activities account the coordination of the foreign affairs of the member states, financial-crediting policies, and the creation and development of a common informational zone, and economic and custom area, i.e. free movement of persons, goods, services, capital and labour. Another field in which the CIS seeks harmonisation is the body law. Article 20, section III, states: “member states will cooperate in the area of law, especially by completing multilateral and bilateral treaties of judicial assistantship, and will bring closer their national legislation.” The energetic component is also of big importance. This is why, the Electro-Energetic Council of the CIS has been established in order to organize stable supply of energy to the consumers in the member states.

The Council of the Head States is the supreme body of the commonwealth, but the Council of Head of Governments also functions. The Councils have the right to adopt decisions regarding “the main important problems on the domestic and external levels, if necessary.” Moreover, the Councils coordinate the foreign affairs activities of the member states, including their actions in international organisations. The official languages of the Councils are the state languages of the member states, however, Russian is the *working language*. Each state can declare its inadvertence towards a certain problem, but this will not obstruct the adoption of a decision. Each member state has the right to denounce the Commonwealth Agreement or some of its parts, by notifying the holder of the Status (the Archive of the government of Belarus) one year before.

The Agreement of Creation of the CIS entered into force in the Republic of Moldova on 8 April 1994. The pro-Romanian and pro-European opposition protested vehemently against Moldova’s entrance into the CIS. The Democratic Party affirmed that “Russia will use the economy to enslave Moldova politically” and that “as long as the occupational 14<sup>th</sup> Army stays in Moldova (Transnistria – n. a.), we can make no alliance with Russia.” In the opinion of Christian-Democrat deputies, “the CIS

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present Treaty shall be applied.” Thus, a supra-national prerogative has been attributed to a structure of the CIS.

Agreement includes not only economic aspects, but also political ones. Moldova would only suffer if any subordination to Russia is legalised by agreements or treaties." According to a joint Declaration of the opposition parties, "the "voluntary" link of Moldova with the new Russian Empire, will badly influence our society; it would mean the legalization of the occupations of 1812, 1940 and 1944" and that "all international talks on Moldova will be made through Moscow." In addition, the opposition claimed that "the CIS membership does not solve economic and energy problems the CIS countries are facing, including Moldova".<sup>31</sup> As BASA-press reported on 3 August 1993, around 200 people protested in the front of the Parliament against Moldova's CIS membership, shouting slogans like: "The Parliament wants us to have an economic, political, social and cultural Gulag!" Even people from the president's surrounding, such as the state advisors, Ștefan Gorda and Vlad Darie, forwarded their demands for dismissal, protesting, this way, to Moldova's accession to the CIS that "would totally distort the image of Moldova as independent state", as Ștefan Gorda put it.

There were mainly two internal factors that determined Moldova's membership in the CIS: first, the supposed guarantee that the community will prevent Moldova's swallowing by one of its neighbours, i.e. Romania; second, the role played by the very influential pro-CIS Russian minority, along with the nostalgic Russophile national minorities.<sup>32</sup> Also, president Mircea Snegur thought that the accession to the CIS would fasten the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict, through commonwealth and Russian pressure. Snegur was sustained by the conservative Democratic Agrarian Party and radical left wing, i.e. the Socialist Party and "Unitate-Edinstvo" Movement (Interfront).<sup>33</sup> For the leader of the agrarians, Dumitru Moțpan, the economic crisis that hit Moldova soon after independence was the result of the collapse of trade links with the countries of the former Soviet space and loss of traditional markets for Moldovan goods. On these grounds, his party was pledging for the "necessity of adherence to the CIS" (Enache, 2000). The second president of Moldova, a former secretary for ideology in the Soviet Union, Petru Lucinschi, was another fervent proponent of the CIS. During his mandate, he actively promoted the idea of a Free-

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<sup>31</sup> BASA-press, [www.basa.md](http://www.basa.md), 02 August 1993

<sup>32</sup> Enache, M., Cimpoeșu D., "Diplomatic mission to the Republic of Moldova. 1993-1997", p.217, Polirom, Iași, 2000

<sup>33</sup> "We opposed the destruction of the USSR and we are still convinced that we were right. Since the USSR restoration is not possible, the former Soviet republics should reunite at least in a confederation. We see no other alternative: Moldova should be part of a political-military union comprising other CIS states". Vladimir Solonari, leader of the "Unitate-Edinstvo" movement, BASA-press, [www.basa.md](http://www.basa.md), 03 August 1994

Trade Zone on the territory of the commonwealth, as a way to increase Moldovan exports. He also continued the line of “compatibility” between Moldova’s integration into the CIS structures and European integration. “No one in the EU told me that we should leave the CIS if we want to get closer to Europe”, declared Petru Lucinschi on several occasions to the media. However, nobody supported so vociferous and loyally the engagement to the CIS, as did Vladimir Voronin, who became the third president of Moldova in April 2001 in a uniquely among the CIS’s countries position: he is an active Communist and he combines the position of head of the state with that of First-Secretary of the party, in accordance with the Soviet model. His foreign policy was a continuation of the previous one, that of *all azimuths*. As Voronin put it when he came to power, Moldova will be present where its national interests lie, especially in Russia and the CIS.<sup>34</sup>

The communist leadership in Chişinău is seen as an expression of Moscow’s interests in Moldova. The Russian government and president Vladimir Putin personally have repeatedly blessed Moldova’s Soviet-nostalgic authorities as “democratic” (despite criticism of “democratic deficit” from the Council of Europe and the European Union), encouraged it to reorient rapidly Moldova’s economy towards the CIS and urge it to embark on cultural and linguistic re-Russification. The reward for Communists’ loyalty came when Vladimir Putin awarded to Vladimir Voronin the *honour* of hosting the CIS summit of 2002, although Moldova was not in line to hold the reunion, since it had done it in 1998, while other member states have never hosted a CIS summit yet. Moreover, according to a Russian analyst on the CIS matters, “Voronin’s voice is being heard loudly, out of proportion to Moldova’s weight and significance within the CIS. Today it is said that Voronin ranks second only to the Ukrainian president, Leonid Kuchma, among the friends of the Chairman of the Council of Heads of State, Vladimir Putin.”<sup>35</sup>

However, almost a decade after Moldova’s accession to the CIS entered into force, one can say that Moldova’s stake on the Commonwealth as a solution to its ardent problems (Transnistria conflict, energy dependence, economic crisis) was wrongful. As president Petru Lucinschi told media, “everybody knows that the internal working mechanism of the CIS is not efficient”. Many of the integration agreements signed by CIS members have not been implemented. According to Dr M. A. Smith, about one agreement in twenty is being implemented out of a total of about 1300

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<sup>34</sup> BBC World Service, Romanian Section, [www.bbc.co.uk/romanian](http://www.bbc.co.uk/romanian), 27 February 2001

agreements. Therefore, although integration exists as a process in the CIS, it cannot be compared to the smoother and more effective integration processes taking place in the European Union.<sup>36</sup> Assessing the activities of the CIS for year 1997, Russian President, Boris Yeltsin, recognized that “the danger of the CIS disintegration emerged” as some of its members prepared their withdrawal (Flux, 21 January 1998). Next year, opening the CIS summit in Kremlin, he stated rightly so that “the Commonwealth proved itself unable to develop on a new interstate basis” and that a new structure had to be established (Flux, 02 April 1999).

Discussions emerged again about the need to reform the organisation and transform it into a more effective integration structure with an emphasis on the economic integration. The activities within the Economic Council were declared a priority and an executive committee was created - all this in an attempt to bring the CIS organisational structure closer to the European Union one. However, this was regarded as a difficult task in the Russian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, which aimed the reform of the CIS into “a regional fully-fledged social-economic organisation”.<sup>37</sup> Despite hundreds of documents, treaties and summits, various unannounced excises and taxes were introduced; restrictions to alcohol imports were instituted and warnings of gas and electricity cuts became frequently. In addition, the provisions of the Custom Union and Free-Trade agreement are not being implemented until present.<sup>38</sup>

For Moldova, the only palpable result of its membership into CIS is probably the ninety-nine Byelorussian tractors brought to Chişinău in March 2002 when, on this occasion, President Vladimir Voronin stated that “this is the result of Moldova’s integration into CIS”, especially that Moldova will have to pay two thousand less dollars per tractor, i.e. eight thousand dollars. The payment will be done in corn-seeds for the agricultural needs of Byelorussia, according to president Voronin. Other “results” of Moldova’s membership into CIS are hard to be found.

Conceived as a formula of “civilised divorce” between the former Soviet republics, the Commonwealth offers today more reasons for disappointments rather than spectacular benefits. The CIS has not come up with solutions for the severe problems that the post-Soviet countries are facing at the moment. (One hundred

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<sup>35</sup> Echo Mosckvy, 30 November 2001, Interfax, 30 November 2001, Flux and BASA-press, 30 November 2001

<sup>36</sup> Conflict Studies Research Centre, “Russia and the Near Abroad”, Dr M. A. Smith, March 1997

<sup>37</sup> Diplomaticeskii Vestnik, MID Rossiiskoi Federatii, No. 5, May, 1999

<sup>38</sup> All this affected the trade stability between the CIS states. Enache, M., Cimpoeşu D., “Diplomatic mission to the Republic of Moldova. 1993-1997”, p.218, Polirom, Iaşi, 2000



millions of inhabitants of the CIS and the European part of the former Soviet Union live below the poverty line, according to a UNDP report released in 1999. A more recent UNDP report, published on 9 July 2003, revealed that Moldova is the poorest country not only of Europe, but also within the CIS). The community is strongly variegated, not just because there are twelve currencies or ten types of frontier-guard uniforms from Chişinău to Kamciatka, but also mainly because its members are very different in terms of political rule (liberal societies versus totalitarian regimes) and economies (free-market orientated economies versus the centralised ones).

“A suitcase without ear”<sup>39</sup> - “it is hard to carry it, but sorrowful to abandon it” is by far the most adequate description of what the commonwealth is about at the present. The community is rather a *Presidential Club*, than a viable international structure and this club continues to display inertia, simply because no one has the courage to declare CIS a useless body that has to be brought to an end.<sup>40</sup> There are no mechanisms of coercion or penalization and, paradoxically, the CIS does not even mediate the conflicts within its territory, such as Nagorno-Karabakh or Transnistria. Moreover, as Radio Free Europe put it, the CIS is not recognized as a subject of international law and no country or international organisation maintains relations with it, as such. The contradictions and constant disputes among the member states have led to the establishment of affiliated bodies of the CIS, like the Economic Euro Asiatic Council (Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan) or the newly agreed Economic Union between Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Belarus, since it became clear that a Free-Trade Zone across the CIS is impossible to establish. But these are also structures without essence, since Russia is seeking influence not through multilateral organizations, but through bilateral relations. The CIS seems to limit to “attempts of synchronization” rather than deepening integration, and is more important for the opportunity that it gives to solve issues of bilateral matters at bilateral meetings.

The CIS was created in 1991 without a clear political vision in medium to long run. Its goal in short term was to maintain the republics in Russia’s sphere of influence after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Also, Russia attempted to regain the influence it has lost in the countries of the Eastern Europe by dominating the CIS countries and persuading the world that the CIS and Russia are the same

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<sup>39</sup> This is how the CIS has been perceived so far, President Vladimir Voronin, BBC World Service, Romanian Section, [www.bbc.co.uk/romanian](http://www.bbc.co.uk/romanian), 07 October 2002

<sup>40</sup> The decisions of this club and the reality are like two different planets whose orbits never interact. Dmitri Ciubasenco, “A suitcase without ear”, [www.azi.md](http://www.azi.md), 14 October 2002



thing. CIS played an important role in the formulation and implementation of Russian policy towards the former Soviet republics (except three Baltic States).<sup>41</sup> As Dr M. A. Smith put it, integration has become the key notion of Russian policy towards its partners in the CIS, which aims the creation of a community of states that is closely tied to Moscow. The Russian Federation can fairly be regarded as the core of this integration process, as it is a process that is taking place largely on the basis of Russian interests.<sup>42</sup> The Putin leadership argued that a stronger CIS integration firstly required the creation of a common law space (similar to the body law of the EU), followed by the development of the Custom Union. But there is awareness that Russia lacks the mechanisms and policy instruments in order to bring a closely integrated CIS united around a Russian core. In this respect, the recent demands of the Foreign Ministry in Moscow to declare Russian the official language in all CIS countries<sup>43</sup>, might be seen as that sort of mechanism that Russia wants to secure in order to preserve its influence in the region.

Nevertheless, it seems that Russia does not need anymore an official confirmation of its status of the CIS leader, as well as it does not want to continue being the “nurse” of *its* small brothers.<sup>44</sup> “This fact has tied up Russia’s hands, compelling it to sacrifice its own interests for the sake of the unity of the CIS. Now that Russia is moving towards the European political and economic space, the long caravan of the CIS might become an essential burden”,<sup>45</sup> as Itoghi newspaper put it in October 2002. This is probably the main reason for Vladimir Putin to resign the position of Chairman of the Council of Heads of State of the CIS and hand it over to the Ukrainian president, Leonid Kuchma. Thus, for the first time since the creation of the CIS, another country besides Russia took over the control of the organisation in 2003. Furthermore, the Russian government has sent official notifications to the governments of the CIS member states to quit a number of treaties and agreements signed within the commonwealth on general principles of tax policy, on customs policy principles, on regulation of social and labour relations in trans-national

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<sup>41</sup> Russia’s relation with the CIS is a priority, which will enable the first to find itself as a great power, the Foreign Minister, Yevgenny Primakov. “Russia seeks a new place in the world”, Izvestia, 6 March 1996

<sup>42</sup> Conflict Studies Research Centre, “Russia and the Near Abroad”, Dr M. A. Smith, March 1997

<sup>43</sup> At the moment, Russian is an official language in Belarus and Kyrgyz tan.

<sup>44</sup> A situation in which Russia had to choose between maintaining the former- Soviet states in a commons space or embracing a more pragmatic policy toward them has emerged. Security Council Secretary, Sergey Ivanov, Flux, 05 February 2001

<sup>45</sup> The total debt of the CIS countries to Russia was about 5,6 billion dollars in 2001. Flux, 05 February 2001

corporations working on the CIS territory, and Convention on trans-national corporations.

Russian and foreign experts are saying that Moscow has begun a conscientious dismantling of the Commonwealth of the Independent States in order to prevent its chaotic disintegration. Also, they are arguing that the inevitability of the CIS's break-up became obvious after Russian President, Vladimir Putin, handed the CIS presidency over to Ukrainian president, Leonid Kuchma, and after the creation of new economic blocs that mark the onset of a real integration in the former Soviet area. Thus, leaders of the CIS member states might soon agree with the proverb that they have been using so far as a joke about the Commonwealth summits: *"The one who does not regret the collapse of the USSR has no heart; the one who wants its restoration has no brains."* (BBC, 2002)

### *Transnistria- the "black hole" of Europe*

Two major problems have marked dramatically the independent state Republic of Moldova since its birth – the separatist conflict on the territory between the Nistru River and Moldova's eastern frontier with Ukraine, known as Transnistria ("over Nistru") and the illegal presence of Russian troops and munitions. In late 1980s, the nationalist movement in Moldova faced vehement opposition of the other ethnic groups, especially of the Găgăuz community and Russian ethnics. The widespread anti-Russian sentiments (primarily directed to the Russian political elite and not to the population) and calls for re-unification with Romania have nourished a "reactive nationalism" among the Russian speakers, which started to organise counter demonstrations and strikes. Protests from the Russian and Ukrainian minorities sprang out in the capital city, Chişinău, and in Bălţi, the second largest city situated in the northern part of Moldova. But the main important movement became the Union of Workers Collectives, created on 11 August 1989 out of several Workers Collectives from Transnistria (ICG Europe Report, 2003).

On 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1990 the "Nistrian Moldovan Socialist Soviet Republic" was proclaimed as part of the Soviet Union. In August 1991, a group of Russian-born citizens of the Russian Federation that mainly held ranks in Russia's military and security services have successfully seized power in Transnistrian region in the putsch of the old guard, which aimed to preserve the USSR. Shortly after Moldova's declaration of independence, on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1991, the Supreme Soviet of

Transnistria adopted its own constitution as part of its policy of step-by-step secession from Moldova. On 1<sup>st</sup> December, Igor Smirnov was elected the “president” of the self-proclaimed republic, whose “independence” was approved on the same day through a referendum. The leader of the separatists consolidated his power the next year thanks to the intervention of the 14<sup>th</sup> Russian Army. During the winter of 1991/1992 and especially after Moldova’s accession to the United Nations on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1992, separatist paramilitary forces attacked several Moldovan police stations in Transnistria and tried to overthrow Moldovan authorities from rural areas loyal to the government in Chişinău. Smirnov’s group gave a strong support to the industrial centres of the region, which were directly subordinated to Moscow and feared any transfer to the Moldovan government, and was supported, in turn, by them. Furthermore, the management of the industrial sector rejected any plans of Moldova’s independence, since its identification was entirely with the Soviet Union. As the International Crisis Group put it, this factor resulted in “a combination of interests and identity symbols that were diametrically opposed to those among Moldovan-speaking communists and pro-Romanian nationalists alike.”<sup>46</sup>

In spring 1992 violence escalated into a total war that lasted for couple of months and in which almost two thousand people were killed (BBC, 16 July 2003). It was the intervention of the Russian president, Boris Yeltsin, which put an end to the fighting in summer of that year when he signed together with the Moldovan president, Mircea Snegur, a Convention in this respect. In 1994 Russia and Moldova concluded an agreement concerning the complete withdrawal of the Russian troops. Yet, the agreement never came into force, since it was not ratified by the Russian Lower Chamber of the Parliament, which decided to examine the “inadmissibility of withdrawing the 14<sup>th</sup> Army from Transnistria” (BASA-press, 10 April 1995). The 14<sup>th</sup> Army was by far the strongest military factor in Moldova, numbering about 9, 250 troops with heavy equipment whose deployment was subject to limitations set by the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe: 126 battle tanks, 198 armoured combat vehicles and 127 artillery pieces.<sup>47</sup> By 1999, the number of 14<sup>th</sup> Army troops had been reduced to 2, 600, but its presence, even if less significant in military terms, is still securing Transnistria’s de facto independence and Russia’s indirect influence over Moldovan leadership.

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<sup>46</sup> International Crisis Group, Europe Report No 147, “Moldova: No Quick Fix”, 12 August 2003

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

At the OSCE summit in Istanbul in late 1999, Russia accepted formal deadlines for the destruction or withdrawal of its equipment by the end of 2001, and total troop and stockpiled munitions' (40,000 tones) withdrawal by the end of 2002. Although Russia respected its engagements in regard to the first deadline (due to heavy diplomatic pressure and promises of considerable financial support), it missed the second one because of the so-called "technical" obstacles, i.e. the opposition of separatist regime in Tiraspol that obstructed the roads with the help of the famous ostensible group "Women of Transnistria" (activities coordinated with Russian leadership, according to observers). At its year-end ministerial meeting held in Portugal in December 2002, the OSCE extended the deadline for the withdrawal of remaining troops and ammunitions to the end of 2003, but potentially for a longer period, given the introduction, on Russia's insistence, of the clause that the withdrawal should be conducted "provided the necessary conditions are in place", although the 1999 Istanbul agreement had mentioned no conditions. Also, the OSCE new document only acknowledged Russia's "intention" to withdraw the troops, not its "obligation" any longer. Moreover, the head of the OSCE mission to Chişinău, William Hill, have already admitted that the withdrawal of Russian equipment before the end of this year is unachievable, because of the opposition of Smirnov's administration.<sup>48</sup> He avoided saying whether the deadline for the withdrawal will be extended or sanctions will be operated against Russia, and he also did not mention a word about the withdrawal of Russian troops, a fact that made observers in Chişinău speak of a Moscow tactic that aims to keep Russian troops in place as "peacekeeper" forces. In this respect, according to Radio Free Europe,<sup>49</sup> hundreds of Russian soldiers have been transferred already to the Transnistrian armed forces; thus, the troops who were supposed to leave Moldova will remain here under a different name.

The OSCE has come under severe criticism in the last year both in Moldova and outside for "being subordinated to Russia", as Taras Kuzio, former chairman of NATO Information Office in Kiev, put it.<sup>50</sup> This "subordination" is displayed not only through a new extension of the deadline for the withdrawal of Russian troops and equipment from Moldova, but also through the support that the OSCE is giving to the Russian proposal to federalize the Republic of Moldova, as a solution to the conflict in Transnistria.

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<sup>48</sup> "We are trying to find a solution, but we did not find one yet. A lot of responsible persons are on summer holiday and this is why things are moving slowly", William Hill, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Ora Moldovei, 20 August 2003

<sup>49</sup> Socor, V., Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Ora Moldovei, 25 July 2003

On 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2002, a draft agreement proposing to turn Moldova into a federation was made public in Kiev during the five-sided negotiations' format, i.e. between Moldova, Transnistria (as parts in conflict), and Russia, the OSCE and Ukraine (as mediators). The draft was initially submitted by the OSCE, but, as it was revealed later on, Russia was the main author of the agreement (BBC, July 2002). According to the Kiev document, the three guarantors would supervise the internal working of the federation, its constitution, legislation and the functioning of its institutions. The proposal was powerfully criticized by the opposition and the civil society in Moldova, and by various international analysts and organizations. Over fifty percent of Moldovans qualified the idea of federalization as unacceptable, according to an opinion poll published by the Institute of Development and Social Initiative "Viitorul" in 2003, and almost forty percent said the federalization would lead to the disintegration of Moldova as a state. As George Soros was among the first to remark, this mechanism (federalised Moldova -n. a.) would, in effect, become a Russian protectorate.<sup>51</sup> According to Wall Street Journal Europe, the arrangement would hand Moscow a permanent lever of influence on "federalized" Moldova and would place it under the "guarantees" of Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE – an arrangement that would ensure multiple Russian representation (in its own right, via OSCE, and via Kiev).<sup>52</sup>

The West is largely excluded from the mediation and guarantee mechanism of the conflict's settlement, its presence being limited to the OSCE role, in which, however, Russia has the right to veto. Romania was excluded from the mediation mechanism in 1992 largely because of Russia's pressure, although its participation as Moldova's neighbour was entirely justified. Yet, the five-sided format has proved unable to solve the conflict. The OSCE failed to identify the reasons that were at the basis of the dispute, but also that led to its freezing (Kuzio, T., 2003). Russia and Ukraine are themselves far from being democratic, the rule of law is constantly violated and the countries are ravaged by corruption. From this perspective, they are obviously unqualified to oversee the democratisation process in Moldova. This is why talks about the need to change the format of negotiations have intensified lately, while the European Union announced its intention to get more actively involved in the settlement of the conflict. The Greek Presidency of the EU sustained that Transnistria

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<sup>50</sup> AP Flux, Chişinău, 24 June 2003

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.basa.md>

<sup>52</sup> Socor, V., "The EU can secure its own neighbourhood", The Wall Street Journal Europe, 25-27 July 2003

should be the conflict of “Wider Europe” in which the EU should get involved. Furthermore, Chairman of the Joint Parliamentary Cooperation Committee EU-Moldova, Jan Marinus Wiersma, claimed that the EU could directly participate in a peacekeeping operation in Transnistria.

Unsurprisingly, Russian Federation and the OSCE and the communist leadership in Chişinău have opposed the EU proposal. For instance, Russian Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Vyacheslav Trubnikov, and the head of the OSCE mission to Moldova, William Hill, have both stated that the current mechanism should be kept, while the Moldovan president, Vladimír Voronin, said that he would not accept military presence “just for the sake of it” (Flux, 30 July 2003), although later on he welcomed this proposal. In addition, the Russian representative in the Chişinău -Tiraspol negotiations, Aleksandr Yakovlenko, affirmed that “this initiative will complicate the difficult negotiation process” and added that “such statements have to be avoided in the future”.<sup>53</sup> On contrary, Romania and Ukraine declared their support to the Dutch initiative in its capacity as EU member state and future OSCE president, which obviously had the agreement of Brussels. Through its involvement into the Transnistrian problem, by sending EU peacekeeping forces to eastern part of Moldova, the EU seeks to contribute to the stabilization of a region that constitutes Russia’s “near abroad”, subject to Russian *droits de regard*, but which in few years time, after Romania’s probable accession in 2007, will become its direct neighbour. Thus, Moldova is no longer to be viewed as Russia’s “near abroad” since it now forms the enlarging Europe’s immediate neighbour.

Although Russians are the third-largest population group in Transnistria (25%), behind Moldovans (40%) and Ukrainians (28%), it is mostly them who rule the region. The authorities are mainly Russian; the top leaders are mostly Russians from Russia (as distinct from local Russians) and the Russian population is concentrated in the city of Tiraspol (“capital” of the self-proclaimed Moldovan Nistrian Republic). Moldovans and Ukrainians are living predominantly in the rural area, still toiling in the Soviet style collective farms - kolkhozes - are underrepresented politically and an object of Soviet-style linguistic Russification by the authorities.<sup>54</sup> No one denies that separatist regime is surviving due to massive profits out of contraband, various types of illegal traffic, arms sales and thanks to a repressive police regime and a big

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<sup>53</sup> Publication of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian federation, 21 July 2003

<sup>54</sup> Socor, V., “How to discredit Democracy and Federalism”, The Wall Street Journal Europe, 6-8 June 2003

security apparatus. In addition, free gas from Russia (\$800 million's worth in officially acknowledged gas debts) keeps the group in power (Socor, V., 2003).

Notwithstanding, the frozen conflict in Transnistria is more accountable to a painless resolution than any of the Balkan or post-Soviet conflicts. It has not led to mass displacement of population and it has not seen any fighting since 1992. Also, it is neither religious, nor interethnic in its nature (though it does have ethnic implications).<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, a rush to solve the problem as quick as possible by federalizing Moldova will not be a settlement, but a defeat.<sup>56</sup> Federalization would empower the citizens and agents of a foreign country, i.e. Russia, which openly profess loyalty to it. Power sharing with the criminal regime of Igor Smirnov in a federation would pull Moldova into Russia's orbit for an unlimited period of time, since the separatist leadership – actually Moscow *via* Tiraspol – would have a strong word to say on Moldova's internal and external affairs.

#### *Ukraine – a “wait and see” position*

After the collapse of the Soviet colossus, Chişinău and Kiev have tried to establish a friendly framework for further development of bilateral relations. Moldova's diplomacy bear in mind Ukraine's capacity to play an important role in maintaining the stability in the region, the common perception of dangers and threats against their states and the similarity of political and economical problems faced by both in the process of independence affirmation.<sup>57</sup>

Since its first hours of independence, Ukraine has started to establish judicial-political relations with its neighbours, including Moldova, on the basis of frontier inviolability with an irreversible character. Kiev diplomacy was successful in achieving rapidly its goals in respect to its relations with Chişinău – on 23 October 1992 the Treaty of Good Neighbourhood, Friendship and Cooperation was concluded between the both parts. Yet, Ukrainian authorities were not so fast with its ratification. On contrary, it conditioned its validation with the finalization of the state-frontier delimitation, a delicate to be problem of the Moldovan-Ukrainian relations. In 1997,

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<sup>55</sup> Socor, V., “The EU can secure its own neighbourhood”, The Wall Street Journal Europe, 25-27 July 2003

<sup>56</sup> See the recommendations of the International Crisis Group, Europe Report No 147, “Moldova: No Quick Fix”, 12 August 2003

<sup>57</sup> To some extent, the same scenario that was at the base of the conflict in Transnistria was thwarted in Crimea. Iurie Leancă, “The Evolution of Foreign Policy”, Transition: Retrospectives and Perspectives, Chişinău, 2002

Moldova's leadership agreed to lease 7,7 kilometre of strategic Odessa-Reni highway in the region of Palanca village for a period of ninety-nine years in exchange for the Ukrainian 100 metre strip of Danube bank in the region of Giurgiulești village. The negotiations were seriously harmed, after the Ukrainian frontier-guards moved their posts 100 metres into Moldova's territory along the Danube River in March 1998. This small territory is of big importance to Moldova that intends to build with the financial support of the EBRD an oil petroleum terminal on Danube River where it possesses almost 1 kilometre of bank. The terminal will have an annual capacity of two million tones of raw petrol. At the moment, Moldova pays eighty dollars per a tone of petrol imported from Russian through Ukraine. The import of petrol through Danube would reduce the costs to fifty dollars per tone. Besides, the terminal would offer the possibility for petrol imports from Orient (Enache, 2000). Finally, the sides have agreed to the exchange of territories - a deal that was qualified as "treason" by some opposition parties.<sup>58</sup> However, in the final text of the Agreement of Frontier Delimitation (signed in Kiev on 26 august 1999) the provision regarding the period of ninety-nine years was not included (Ukrainian side did not present any relevant reasons in this respect) and the 7,7 kilometre stretch of strategic Odessa-Reni highway became property of Ukraine.

Ukraine is one of the biggest trade partners of the Republic of Moldova. According to official data, in the first half of year 2003 Ukraine was the leading exporter country, its delivered goods accounting for almost one hundred thirty million dollars per year. Although the Ukrainian minority is the biggest one in Moldova (13,8%), it was the least active in re-acquiring its national identity after the collapse of the USSR, partly because it is the community that was most assimilated during the Soviet times, but also because it did not have a compact existence, as did the Găgăuz (Christian Turks) and Bulgarians ethnics situated in the southern part of Moldova. Thus, the Ukrainian minority did not pose to the central authorities in Chișinău the kind of challenges that Russian ethnics did, and this issue did not become a problem that sought a solution at the interstate level.

As in the case of Moldovan-Russian relationship, the Moldovan-Ukrainian one was influenced substantially by the Transnistrian conflict. Kiev's leadership had a downright position in respect to the withdrawal of Russian troops from Moldova, which was expressed consistently in the front of the international community, to a large extent because Ukraine was facing the same problem in its southern part

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<sup>58</sup> BBC World Service, Romanian Section, [www.bbc.co.uk/romanian](http://www.bbc.co.uk/romanian), June 2000



(Crimea) and it did not want the presence of Russian troops at its western frontier as well. However, as far as the process of political settlement of Transnistrian conflict was concerned, Ukraine had a controversial and unsteady stance. In the first years of the conflict, because of its separatist movements in Crimea, Ukraine had a very weak position and accepted totally the scenario imposed by Moscow authorities in dealing with the breakaway region of Transnistria, which gave a tacit support to separatists in Tiraspol. By the mid 1990s, once the stability came to Crimea and to Ukrainian-Russian relationship, Kiev started to promote a more active and independent policy in regard to the crisis in Transnistria. This way, in late 1990s it was not hard to notice incisiveness in Ukraine's position that came up with its own scenario of political settlement of the crisis in the eastern part of Moldova - *Poetaпноie razresenie conflictă* ("step-by step" solution of the conflict). De facto, that meant a gradual recognition of the separatist administration without a guarantee that a compromise would be reached.

Furthermore, each time Chişinău moved closer to Moscow, Kiev started to support separatist leaders. Also, the position of the administration in Tiraspol got closer to Kiev, every single time the Ukrainian authorities proposed a solution to the dispute. Tensions also appeared because of Kiev's refusal to establish joint control along its border with Moldova's territory that is controlled by separatist authorities. This hostile position went against the statements of the Ukrainian authorities regarding their availability to contribute to the resolution of the Transnistrian crisis. Also, it confirmed Ukraine's unwillingness to seal off its borders to stop contraband because too many Ukrainians make money here.

This is why, from the perspective of Ukraine's biased involvement in the Transnistrian conflict, which does not follow the line of the Chişinău leadership and encourages the fulfilment of geo-politic interests of Moscow, I would classify Ukraine as a factor that represents and maintains, to some extent, the eastern orientation of the foreign affairs of the Republic of Moldova, despite Ukraine's positive role of balancing Russia's influence in the region. Ukraine could become the opposite, if it would support through effective means the *Europeanisation* of the settlement process in the breakaway region of Moldova. Also, pledging in favour of European Union and NATO membership and moving closer to these organizations, Ukraine could become the driving force in Moldova's efforts to join the European community. However, there is a long and uneasy way to go in order to get to this point, since both countries are facing severe political crisis on the domestic scene and are still

economically and politically dependent on Russia, a factor that hinders their European aspirations.

### **CHAPTER III. MOLDOVA AND THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION: LOOKING WESTWARDS?**

#### *Romania and Moldova – the two Romanian states*

After the annexation of the Romanian territory between the Prut and Nistru Rivers to the Soviet Union in 1940, Prut became not just a fluid demarcation line between the two parts, but also a frontier that had to block the access of any Romanian element to the newly created Soviet Moldovan Republic. In the light of late '80s reforms that Moscow embraced, i.e. *perestroika*, *glasnost* and *acceleration*, and after the overthrow of Ceaușescu dictatorship in Romania, measures were taken to bring Moldova closer to Romania.

Romania was the first country to recognize internationally the independence of Moldova, only few hours after its proclamation on 27 August 1991. At that time, independence was seen as the first step in Moldova's return to its mother country (BBC, 2001). A concept of "the two Romanian states" originated in Bucharest, but the leadership in Chișinău, which acknowledged the common shared history, language and culture, also accepted it. Thus, the framework for a privileged relationship, based on political, economic and cultural integration, as well as support and mutual help at the international level, was set up. Moreover, the relations between Moldova and Romania had to develop in line with their similar aspirations on their road "back to Europe" and their wish to reunite within the Euro-Atlantic organizations. Moldova figured in all Romanian strategic programs and programs of regional and sub-regional cooperation. Dozens of agreements and conventions regarding cooperation

in various fields were signed and special funds of the Romanian Government were allocated to Moldova, such as thousand scholarships for students. However, the opportunity for “privileged” relationship was not turned to the best account because of the policy of rejecting all Romanian factors, which emerged soon after Moldova’s independence within the neo-communist agrarian group of the first parliament and which was vociferously applied after agrarians came to power in 1994.

The Moldovan stream as opposed to Romanian tendency started to gain grounds in Chişinău. The concept of „two Romanian states” was rejected and the anthem „Deşteaptă-te Române” (Romanian, awake!) was replaced with ”Limba Noastră” (Our Language) that, ironically, was written by a prominent Romanian poet.<sup>59</sup> Article 13 of the new Constitution of the Republic of Moldova adopted in 1994 proclaimed “Moldovan”, not Romanian, the official language of the country. Thus, the Soviet policy of Moldovenism as opposed to Romanian, which was initiated in 1924 with the creation of Autonomous Soviet Socialist Moldova Republic (ASSMR) on the eastern border of Great Romania, was resumed. The ASSMR had in view the invention of a distinct Moldovan identity and, ultimately, a separate Moldovan nation (King, Ch., 2002). So, the agrarian government made a decisive step towards Moldova’s detachment from Romania.

Although “the importance of multilateral cooperation with Romania” was underlined at the official level in Chişinău and the Concept of Foreign Policy of 1995 stated that „a special attention is given to the cooperation with Romania in order to overcome Moldova’s economic unilateral dependence and to integrate it into the European community”, in reality, the dialogue between the two states was scarcely structured and coherent both on the political and economic levels.<sup>60</sup> In 1996, Petru Lucinschi, a politician that had close links to Moscow, was elected president of Moldova. He replaced the “privileged” character of Moldovan-Romanian relationship with the so-called “pragmatic” one. Petru Lucinshi also rejected the concept of “the two Romanian states” (BBC, 2001).

After the parliamentary elections in 1998, a democratic and pro-reforms parliamentary coalition was formed out of centre-right wing parties. As a result, the

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<sup>59</sup> President Snegur called “unfounded” President Iliescu’s unionist hopes, while Moldovan deputy speaker Andronic said that “the statements made by the Romanian officials on the possible reunification of Moldova with Romania might stimulate to greater activity the advocates of Moldova’s adherence to the CIS collective security system, which might lead to the deployment of collective troops at the border with Romania”, BASA-press, Chişinău, 24 October 1994

<sup>60</sup> Iurie Leancă, “The Evolution of Foreign Policy”, Transition: Retrospectives and Perspectives, Chişinău, 2002

foreign policy saw considerable changes, i.e. the European Integration was declared a priority of Moldova's foreign affairs, while the relations with Bucharest were qualified as essential and indispensable to Moldova's European aspirations. The dialogue between the head of states, prime ministers and ministers was given an impulse to. Far-reaching economic projects were written down, whose enforcement would have not only positively influence the cooperation between Moldova and Romania, but also set down the necessary conditions for Moldova's further multidimensional integration within South Eastern Europe.<sup>61</sup> Yet, the main obstacle in the fulfilment of these projects was the lack of financial resources. Romania was part of PHARE program, while Moldova was included in the TACIS fund of the EU. Consequently, given the difficulties of interoperability among these funds, but also because of the bureaucracy in Brussels, the main goals of the above mentioned projects were not achieved. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that Romania made constant efforts in order to strengthen Moldova's western orientation, mainly in the front of the international organizations. For example, Romanian diplomacy played an important role in respect to Moldova's inclusion into the Initiative of Cooperation in South-Eastern Europe and the Stability Pact in the region.

After the February 2001 early parliamentary elections that saw an overwhelming return of the Communists' Party to power,<sup>62</sup> the relationship with Romania reached its most difficult period. The communist president, Vladimir Voronin, said he wants to create "modern socialism" by aiming closer ties with Russia. He has described Moldova as a "European Cuba" that must hold out against "imperialists predators" in Europe, as Cuba had in the America.<sup>63</sup> Simultaneously, the communist leadership initiated an aggressive policy towards Romania, accusing it of expansionism and direct interference in Moldova's internal affairs, during an enquiry at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg in the case of the Metropolitan Church of Basarabia, subordinated to the Romanian Orthodox Church. Ironically, communists were the one to recognize and legitimise the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia,

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<sup>61</sup> The projects were highly supported by the United States and the European Union. Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Painful transition (serious deterioration of living standards of the majority of the population), the corruption and everlasting fights of the democratic forces, the structure of the electorate (over 500 000 of young and pro-European voters have left the country because of poverty, while Soviet-nostalgic pensioners and veterans were the most loyal electorate) and the deficient electoral system that gave communists 71 seats out of 101 in parliament, although only 33% voted for them – this are the main reasons for communists' victory.

<sup>63</sup> Vladimir Voronin made this statement on 22 April 2001 in the opening of a Communist meeting dedicated to the birth of V. I. Lenin

after a final decision of the ECHR at the end of the year 2001.<sup>64</sup> As a reply, the Romanian prime minister cancelled his visit to Chişinău stressing that it was impossible for the bilateral relations to be maintained until the accusations were cleared out. However, the communists went even further by announcing plans to make Russian an official language and compulsory in schools, like in the Soviet times, and to replace “The History of Romanians” with “The History of Moldova”, which enhanced the Soviet Stalin-style concept of Moldovenism. Months of anti-communist protests sparked at the beginning of 2002, which ended only when the communists formally gave up to their plans, under the pressure of the Council of Europe.<sup>65</sup> Meanwhile, the Romanian leadership adopted a strategy that sought to put an end to the diplomatic tensions between Bucharest and Chişinău, by focusing on the economic cooperation and support for Moldova’s European integration. Also, the Romanian authorities announced their intention not to sign the Political Treaty with Moldova because “it would not bring anything special and new from the perspective of Romania’s position towards Moldova”, according to the Romanian prime minister, Adrian Năstase.<sup>66</sup> In the words of local and outside observers, this refusal signals a pragmatic and non-ideological attitude of Romania towards Moldova, especially since the treaty would not bring current or future benefits to both sides. Also, it is considered that Romania had a tacit approval of the EU in this respect.

By conceiving the relationship Bucharest - Chişinău as a component of the Moscow-Chişinău relationship, the communist leadership proves that it continues to be captured by an ideological approach in its rapports with Romania. Moreover, in Moscow is still largely spread the idea that Russia and Romania are engaged in a competition for influence in Moldova. As V. Socor put it, “the judgement according to which a normalization in the Bucharest-Moscow relationship would form a reason for further involvement of Bucharest in Moldovan domestic affairs is totally wrongful and represents a legacy of the past that has no base in the present times” (Flux, 2003). Hence, the relationship between *the two Romanian states* was characterized by a bizarre sinuous development, as a consequence of the “identity crisis” of Moldovan authorities and the suspicion they treated with Bucharest’s policies (with some

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<sup>64</sup> Vladimir Voronin declared in his first press conference as Moldova’s president that he would not admit the legalisation of Romanian Church in Moldova. BBC World Service, Romanian Section, [www.bbc.co.uk/romanian](http://www.bbc.co.uk/romanian), April 2001

<sup>65</sup> The resolution on the functioning of the democratic institutions in the Republic of Moldova read that the political, economic and social situation is at a critical point...the enforcement of a moratorium on any measures concerning the study of history and language was recommended. BBC World Service, Romanian Section, [www.bbc.co.uk/romanian](http://www.bbc.co.uk/romanian), 24 April 2002

<sup>66</sup> Flux, Chişinău, 28 July 2003

exceptions). On the other hand, Romania did not possess, unlike the Russian Federation, the necessary financial and economic potential in order to support the Republic of Moldova in overcoming the political and economic problems that it has been facing since its first hours of independence.

### *The Council of Europe - Monitoring Moldova*

The Republic of Moldova became the first CIS country to join the Council of Europe (CoE) in 1995. The admission was more than acceptance into the European democratic family, it actually represented further recognition on the international level of Moldova's independence and a consolidation of its statehood. Moldova's admittance occurred in the light of Council of Europe recommendations and, respectively, some commitments by the first regarding the post-accession fulfilment of the criteria required for membership. Subsequently, these commitments were and still are subject to monitoring by the Parliamentary Assembly of the CoE. Two problems were a hallmark that characterized Moldova-CoE relationship: the recognition and legalization of the Metropolitan Church of Basarabia, and the case of the political prisoners in Transnistrian jails - both subjects of trials at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR).

The issue of the Metropolitan Church of Basarabia is a political and, to some extent, a foreign one. The Church, subordinated canonically to the Romanian Orthodox Church, was liquidated after Moldova's annexation to the Soviet Union and a Metropolitan Church canonically dependent on the Russian Patriarchy was established. The authorities of the independent Republic of Moldova recognized immediately the Russian Church and refused permanently the authorization of the Romanian one. Thus, a Patriarchy whose history is closely linked to the history of the Greater-Russian expansionism and which has been a tool in the service of this expansionism was given a central role on the spiritual and identity formation in Moldova. So, Moscow's power and leverage was highly maintained in the former Soviet republic with the direct approval and protection of the local leadership, which feared that Moldova would turn towards the Romanian cultural realm, if the legalization of the Metropolitan Church of Basarabia were to be afforded. Notwithstanding, Moldovan authorities had to admit to legality the Romanian Church after a final decision of the ECHR in late 2001.

The problem of the political prisoners is still not solved and far from settlement.

Ilie Ilașcu, Alexandru Leșco, Tudor Petrov-Popa and Andrei Invașoc were arrested in 1992 under accusations of terrorism. Ilie Ilașcu has been sentenced to death, but, as a result of the pressure of international community, he was sentenced to life prison. The other persons were sentenced to twelve and fifteen years of prison. The separatist leader, Igor Smirnov, has conditioned their early release with requests of forgiveness in this respect. Alexandru Leșco, Tudor Petrov-Popa and Andrei Invașoc have refused to sign this kind of letters because they do not recognize the regime that has condemned them. In 1999, the solicitors of the " Ilașcu group" accused Russia Federation and the Republic of Moldova of violation of numerous articles of the European Convention of Human Rights at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. ECHR will take a decision on this matter by the end of this year.

The worsening of the political and social situation after the Party of Communists came to power in 2001 and the emergence of a serious political crisis in Chișinău have led to a real climax between Moldova, as member of the CoE, and Council of Europe, as such, when an intention to initiate a special procedure aimed at excluding Moldova from chairing the Committee of Ministers was expressed. The intention was eventually dropped, however, the very fact of its existence revealed the seriousness of the existing democracy side slipping in the Republic of Moldova.

### *European Union and Moldova: a missed opportunity?*

The dialogue between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union developed sporadically, incoherently and with an inadequate dynamic in the first years of Moldova's existence as a state (Leancă, 2002). The lack of a clear European orientation in Chișinău's foreign policy towards Brussels has determined a strategy of the EU that placed Moldova in the same geo-political context with the former Soviet republics, except and unlike Baltic States that were immediately engaged in their journey "back to Europe". Moreover, Moldova was put in the same basket with Mongolia as far as the technical assistance of the EU was regarded. Moldova has been offered by the EU a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement in 1995 (enacted only in 1998!) that defined the relations between the two.<sup>67</sup> In spite of all advantages the country could have as a result of the PCA implementation, this

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<sup>67</sup> The implementation of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement is financially supported through the TACIS programme. The Newly Independent States (NIS) have received far less funds than the countries participating in the CARDS programme for South-Eastern Europe: half the amount while the

document did not provide for a clear finality of Moldova's relations with the EU, i.e. membership of the Union.

The main important reason for this attitude laid down in Moldova's failure to define the EU membership as strategic orientation and its member states as strategic partners, and its engagement in a multidimensional foreign policy of "balancing between East and West." According to the 1995 Conception of Foreign Affairs, "taking into account the weight of the developed Occident states in the world economy and its roles in the system of international relations...the Republic of Moldova will pay special attention to the development of a relationship of partnership and cooperation in multiple fields with Germany, France, Italy and Great Britain."<sup>68</sup>

Various internal and external factors influenced developments in Moldova after its independence. However few of them were crucial in determining its treatment by the EU members and its further place after the USSR collapsed. Moldova's appeal to the most ardent supporters of Central-Eastern European countries (CEEC), such as Germany and Britain, remained weak and proved rather unpopular for Western investors and exporters, due to Moldova's insignificance for Western economy (in comparison to the Visegrad and Baltic countries), lack of geographical proximity, modest progress and incoherence towards economic reforms and political instability, aggravated seriously after a civil war erupted in the breakaway region of Transnistria in 1992.

For example, the geographical, historical and cultural proximity played an important role in the European integration efforts of the Baltic States since Scandinavian countries have ensured that they would be included in the Association process as soon and as deep as possible, with the Nordic pattern becoming a model for economic and political reforms. As a result, the three Baltic States became less dependent upon the Russian market, being drawn more seriously into linkages with Scandinavian economies. On contrary, Moldova's pledge on the European level was considerably weakened by the lack of such a strong patron. Romania was not seen anymore as Moldova's advocate, as the pro-independence Moldovan current as opposed to unification with Romania emerged in Chişinău. Moreover, Romania's patrons – France and, to a lesser extent, Italy – opposed more generous concessions to the CEEC applicants because of domestic constraints and

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CARDS countries only represent 10% of the population of the NIS, "The EU & Moldova", Federal Trust for Education and Research, 2004

<sup>68</sup> The Conception of Foreign Policy, The Official Monitor of the Republic of Moldova, Chişinău, 06 April 1995



scepticism. Thus, the questions of “patronage” stood in sharp contrast to the experiences of CEEC and Baltic States, whose association was powerfully supported by Germany and Scandinavian countries, and Moldova, which experienced a lack of effective advocacy given its insufficient credibility.

Germany was the only EU member state to react relatively quickly to the appearance of the new state, the Republic of Moldova, by establishing a diplomatic mission in Chişinău in 1999. France was the second Western European country to open its Embassy in Moldova (yet this does not fully operate), being followed by the United Kingdom that sent its Ambassador to Chişinău in summer 2002.

As the European integration became a priority for Moldovan leadership, which realised the need of an intensive and consistent dialog with the Western capitals, and Chişinău made explicit in 1999 its aim to join the EU, its relations with the Union member states took a positive turn. An insistent and animated Moldovan diplomacy started to pledge in Brussels and other European chief cities the place of the country in the European context: Chişinău was seeking, at least, Moldova’s location into the South-Eastern dimension of Europe. Also, a requirement of the further launch of accession negotiations between the EU and Moldova was made, since that would make the country eligible for the EU membership. In the same manner, the diplomacy of Chişinău has requested the launching of bargains aiming the conclusion of a Free Trade Agreement with the EU<sup>69</sup> and has also asked for a more active involvement of the organization in the political settlement of the conflict in Transnistria.

When the EU inaugurated the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe (SPSEE) in 1999, Moldovan government made important efforts for its inclusion into this new regional initiative, which was conceived as a regional anchor to the country (it was for the first time when the EU officially identified Moldova as a South-Eastern European country) and a placement into a new geo-politic and geo-economic context. Moldova’s main objective has been receiving a clear perspective of integration into the European Union offered by the Pact. Although running the risk of being attached the label of a Balkan country in the negative sense of this expression, Moldova’s diplomacy aimed to leave the CIS group of countries and gradually join the South-East European group. However, this objective led only to a partial success. Formally,

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<sup>69</sup> Moldova has lost part of its agricultural markets in the former Soviet Union but the EU has not offered a real alternative that would allow the country to reorient its trade in a Western direction. So it remains dependant upon the old relations in the East, also in other areas like energy. “The EU & Moldova”, Federal Trust for Education and Research, 2004

the Republic of Moldova has been recognized as a South-East European state by the United States that accepted it as a full participant to the South East European Cooperation Initiative (SECI) and included Moldova in the US Action Plan for South East Europe.<sup>70</sup>

The authorities of the Republic of Moldova perceived the eventual exclusion of Moldova from the Stability Pact as an indefinite drive out from the configuration of a new democratic and prosperous Europe, especially in the light of Romania's accession negotiations with the EU. As O. Ungureanu wrote, this fact could lead, *inter alia*, to the political and economic breakaway of the Republic of Moldova from the neighbouring countries of South-Eastern Europe and the whole European space; growth of the economic gap between Moldova and the countries of this area and difficulties in Moldova's economic and trade relations with the countries of South-East Europe involved in the process of negotiations with the EU on the Stabilization and Association Agreements, and difficulties generated by restrictions imposed by the EU in the relationship with third countries.<sup>71</sup>

One of the visible results of Chişinău's insistence was a more active involvement of the EU countries in the settling process of the Transnistrian crisis. For example, the Netherlands has proposed the EU to send its representative to the Primakov commission created in Moscow, according to a similar mechanism that has been used in Kosovo (the Ahtisaari-Cernomârdin commission). The implementation of this scheme would have comprised an unprecedented EU presence not just in the breakaway region, but also in Moldova's affairs and, to a large extent, could have influenced its destiny. Yet, this proposal was not turn into practice.

On the other hand, the bilateral relations between Moldova and various Western countries saw a positive turn. Germany was the most receptive to Moldova's European aspirations, German diplomats being among the first in the EU to acknowledge Moldova's potential to become part of the Eastwards enlargement of the Union.<sup>72</sup> During 1998-1999, Moldovan-French relationship has developed prodigiously. After the visit to Chişinău of the G7 leader, President Jaques Chirac, far-reaching economic and trade projects were outlined. Also, the dialogue with

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<sup>70</sup> Ungureanu, O., "The Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe and the prospect of the inclusion of the Republic of Moldova", *South-East Europe Review*, Quarterly of the Hans-Böckler-Foundation, p. 129-139, Issue 04/2000

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> The State Minister of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Cristoph Zoepel, stated in Chişinău that Moldova could ask for negotiations of a Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU, which would replace the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, BASA-press, Chişinău, 10 July 2001

Britain has animated and, after the visit of the deputy secretary for political affairs in May 2000 to Moldova, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office decided to open its Embassy in Chişinău and support its participation in the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe. Further, after the Spanish group “Union Fenosa” has privatised the central and southern electricity supply of Moldova, a chance to give an impulse to the relations with Madrid has appeared.

The early parliamentary elections in February 2001 saw a massive return of the Communists’ Party to power. The electoral foreign policy of the Party foresaw a development of relations on *all azimuths*, especially with the CIS group of countries, and an eventual accession to the Russia-Belarus Union. Yet, after the results of the elections were announced, the new president of Moldova, the first-secretary of the Communists’ Party, Vladimir Voronin, claimed that the foreign policy will not envisage essential changes and that it would be characterised by pragmatism and realism. The immediate actions of the new leadership came to confirm these statements: the Republic of Moldova acceded to the World Trade Organization (despite the opposition of the Communist Members of the Parliament) and Moldova became a member of the SPSEE. But these were actually the results of the activities undertaken by the previous two governments (of Ion Sturza and Dumitru Braghiş prime-ministers), and not achievements of the new communist leadership (Leancă, 2002).

However, new accents occurred in Moldova’s foreign policy, once with the dismissal of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.<sup>73</sup> Under the title of “strategic partnership” with Russia Federation, Moldova moved towards a unilateral policy, embracing the Eastern orientation of its foreign affairs. For instance, from April 2001 until summer 2002, president Voronin met Russian president, Vladimir Putin nine times (a record in this respect). Step-by-step, Chişinău abandoned the concept of “economic security”, which pledged for a diversification of exports and energetic resources, and Russian investors and capital entered rapidly Moldovan economy and trade.

The European integration objective was limited exclusively to a state of declarations and a lack of concrete actions aiming to bring Moldova closer to the EU, such as the harmonization of national legislation and the creation of state institutions responsible for Moldova’s integration within the EU, could be easily noticed. Also, the

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<sup>73</sup> The minister for Foreign Affairs, Nicolae Tăbăcaru, was dismissed because he did not maintain and develop Moldova’s relations with the CIS countries and, especially, with Russia Federation. Moldova must develop its relations with Russia, on which it depends economically, not with Occident. Leader of the Communist MPs, Victor Stepaniuc, Flux, 23 November 2000

dialog with the European Commission and European capitals became sporadic, while sightings of Moldovan politicians and diplomats in European capital cities became an increasingly rare occurrence.

The membership of the Stability Pact did not bring the anticipated political and economic benefits, because of the inability (and lack of wish) of the communist leadership to give more substance and coherence to this regional initiative. The crisis that occurred in the Moldovan-Romanian relationship, after the Communists accused Romania of expansionism, has determined the inefficiency of Moldova's membership in the Stability Pact. The regional projects were the main important dimension of the SPSEE, so an excellent cooperation with Romania was needed in order to obtain political and financial support within the Pact. Since that was not the case, Moldova soon found itself behind the other members of the initiative and was not treated anymore in the South -Eastern geopolitical context by Brussels.

Furthermore, the communist government started a policy of intimidation and discrimination against the biggest EU investor, the Spanish group "Union Fenosa", announcing that the agreement of privatisation signed up with the previous government was illegal, for instance. This has led to difficulties and problems in Moldova's recent relations with the EU and financial international organizations, namely the World Bank.

In March 2003 the European Commission presented to the European Parliament a document with the title "Wider Europe",<sup>74</sup> which set out a new framework for relations over the coming decade with its future neighbours that do not currently have the perspective of EU membership, but who will soon find themselves sharing direct border with the Union, including Moldova. The Commission refused to say whether any of these countries could become members of the EU and it offered the "ring of friends" participation in all EU policies, but not in its institutions. However, it suggested that all neighbourhood countries should be offered the prospect of a Free Trade Agreement, provided that concrete progress and effective implementation of political, economic and institutional reforms on "shared values" take place. Although the element of differentiation was underlined, the same document deals with the eastern and southern border regions, which creates the impression that Moldova was not only put in the same basket with Ukraine and Belarus, but also with countries like Morocco – a fact that led to a reaction of disappointment in Chişinău,

since it was a sign of essential diminution of Moldova's chances for the membership of the Union. This was soon confirmed by the spokesman for external relations of the EU, Diego de Oyeda, who claimed that Moldova's accession to the EU is not taken into consideration by the Union. "We don't know if Moldova's inclusion into the EU will ever be an option. Time will show. All we can offer at this moment is the advantage to participate in the common European market", he added in an interview with Radio Free Europe.<sup>75</sup>

Meanwhile, the communist authorities intensify their European rhetoric, by requesting the type of asymmetric trade preferences already granted to the Western Balkans countries and asking the Commission to open a delegation office in Moldova<sup>76</sup>. In this respect, the chairman of the Joint Parliamentary Cooperation Committee EU-Moldova, Jan Marinus Wiersma, has announced the availability of the European Parliament to establish the EU Embassy in Chişinău. Also, President Voronin claimed in a meeting with Commissions' president, Romano Prodi, that Moldova will adopt a concept of European Integration of the country and will create a department to deal exclusively with this matter. Recently, the communist leader stated that "the European road" is the optimal choice for Moldova's development and the strategic document of the country, "more important than any other party programs".<sup>77</sup>

However, the gap between the pro-European statements and actions of Moldovan authorities is too large, a fact that questions the frankness of these declarations. According to V. Socor, "the nullification of an administrative-territorial system that was implemented with the financial support of the Occident and which aimed the homogenisation of the local public Moldovan authorities to the European one, and its replacement with a Soviet-type administrative reform is one of the proofs of Moldova's moving off from Europe, not its appropriation to it" (Flux, April 2003). The communist authorities in Chişinău lacked political will to embrace the sort of reforms that it knew the EU is looking for, such as the liberalization of economy, safeguard of the judiciary autonomy, respect of the press freedom and human rights,

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<sup>74</sup> Paving the Way for a New Neighbourhood Instrument, "Wider Europe Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations With Our Eastern and Southern Neighbours", 11 March 2003, [http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations)

<sup>75</sup> Flux, Chişinău, 25 June 2003

<sup>76</sup> At the moment Moldova is served by the Commission's delegation for Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus in Kiev.

<sup>77</sup> Infotag, [www.azi.md](http://www.azi.md), 28 August 2003

and the improvement of the investment environment.<sup>78</sup> Yet, more important and serious was the incapacity of the administration in Moldova to fulfil the sort of reforms required. Besides, the Republic of Moldova has lacked the clarity of objectives in its pro-European course to secure a solid relationship with the EU in the long term. Its foreign policy was and still is rather ill defined: it seeks closer economic ties with Russia and CIS on the one hand and with the EU on the other.

Given the need for drastic reforms and the necessity of pushing the local elites forward, more leverage is needed. As Jan Marinus Wiersma MEP argued, asking Moldova to implement Copenhagen criteria without being clear about the reward, will not work.<sup>79</sup> However, Moldova should be more insistent and should take real measures in order to increase its credibility in the eyes of the Union member states since the EU does not make generous gestures unless it has strong and convincing reasons.

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<sup>78</sup> The spokesman for external relations of the EU, Diego de Oyeda, in an interview with Radio Free Europe, Flux, Chişinău, 25 June 2003

<sup>79</sup> The financial instrument should be different from TACIS and look more like PHARE, with more possibilities for investments and with a strategy for poverty reduction. "The EU & Moldova", Federal Trust for Education and Research, 2004

## CHAPTER IV. SIMULTANEOUS INTEGRATION IN THE CIS AND THE EU – A CONTRADICTION IN TERMS

*“The moment Moldova enters the EU it will have to say “Goodbye” to the CIS”,  
Jan Marinus Wiersma<sup>80</sup>*

The previous chapters examined the Eastern vector of Moldova's foreign affairs and presented the main important elements of its European orientation, as well as some historic considerations that outlined the clashes of European (Latin) and Slavic cultures on the present territory of the Republic of Moldova. This part of the paper will analyse how the both positions interacted and influenced each other in more than a decade of Moldova's existence as independent state.

As it was argued earlier, Russian Federation is at the core of the Eastern course of Moldovan foreign policy since there are powerful political, economic, cultural and military factors that keep Moldova in the Russian sphere of influence. The bilateral relationship is marked by Russian military presence on Moldova's eastern part and Chişinău's considerable economic<sup>81</sup> and energetic dependency<sup>82</sup>, while a notable part of Moldova's population still has a psychological attachment to Russia, in terms of memories of relative welfare experienced during Soviet times. Also, the multilateral cooperation of Moldova in the post-USSR space, i.e. the Commonwealth of Independent States, is dominated by Russia. Most of Moldova's trade with the CIS is

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<sup>80</sup>BBC World Service, Romanian Section, [www.bbc.co.uk/romanian](http://www.bbc.co.uk/romanian), 12 June 2003

<sup>81</sup> Russia is Moldova's largest trade partner, with its share in the total export and Moldovan import equalling 37.1% and 15.2% respectively. [www.pravda.ru](http://www.pravda.ru), 25 June 2003

<sup>82</sup> The energy sector, where many former Soviet states are still heavily dependent on Russian oil and gas supplies, plays an important role in locking the other former Soviet States into a state of

actually trade with Russia. In 2000, 75 per cent of its exports to and 46 per cent of the imports from CIS countries were with Russia, which has also become the most important investor in Moldova. As C. Neukirch put it<sup>83</sup>, with the partial exception of neighbouring Ukraine (12, 9 per cent of Moldovan exports to CIS in 2000) and of Belarus (7,9 per cent) no other CIS country plays a noticeable role in Moldovan economics. From this perspective, it becomes clear that for Chişinău, the CIS is first of all a forum to balance relations with Russia in a multilateral setting.

Russia has weighty leverage over Moldovan leaders largely due to the common shared Soviet past - a predominant feature of Chişinău's domestic politics. The governing programmes of the first governments had no references to the integration into the European Union. The agrarian government of Andrei Sangheli (1994-1997) dedicated a single sentence to this matter, which was placed next to the CIS as far as the priorities of Moldovan foreign affairs were concerned. The next cabinet (Ciubuc I, 1997-1998) did not make any remarks regarding the EU, but it presented in detail the activities on widening and deepening of the country participation in the CIS. By contrasts, the program of Government Ciubuc II (1998-1999) contained a special section fully dedicated to the issue of European Integration.

However, the European Integration as a strategic objective of Moldova's foreign policy was set up only in 1998 by the cabinet of the young and reformist businessman, Ion Sturza – the only executive that took substantial measures in order to bring Moldova closer to the EU. Even the title of its programme, "Supremacy of the Law, Revival of Economy, European Integration", acknowledged the crucial place of the European aspirations of Moldova. Related to the relations with the CIS group of countries, priorities were given to bilateral links between the member states of the Commonwealth. In addition, the relationship with Russian Federation was mentioned only in the context of Transnistrian conflict.<sup>84</sup> Thus, the policy of *all azimuths* of the previous governments was declined and an explicit course was brought in. Nevertheless, the political orientation changed again after the dismissal in late 1999 of Sturza cabinet (some of its members facing severe corruption allegations) and the establishment of the Braghiş Government, as a result of the alliance of Communist and Christian Democrat members of parliament. Consequently, the European Union

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dependency and disciplining the states of the near abroad. Conflict Studies Research Centre, Dr M. A. Smith, "Contemporary Russian perceptions of Euro Atlanticism", February 2002

<sup>83</sup> "The EU & Moldova", Federal Trust for Education and Research, 2004

<sup>84</sup> "The Republic of Moldova and European Integration", Institute for Public Policy, Chişinău, 2002



lost its strategic place, which was designated again to the CIS. The dedication of Moldovan authorities to the CIS has become even stronger after a Communist government came to power in early 2001.

Moldovan authorities failed to define clearly Moldova's foreign priorities after the proclamation of independence and continued to pursue a multi-vector policy. As the first president, Mircea Snegur, claimed in an interview to "Financial Times, "the signing of the CIS Agreement on the Economic Union by Moldova does not mean ceasing relations with Romania and Western countries. Moldova remains open for cooperation with all countries" (BASA press, October 1993). President Snegur was also among the first to argue that there was no contradiction between Moldova's membership of the CIS and its European course – a thesis that was largely propagated by the second pro-Moscow president, Petru Lucinschi. For example, on different occasions he declared that Moldova's participation in CIS policies does not run counter to its efforts of European Integration, since all the CIS members, including Russia, wish to integrate within the European system (Flux, January 2000) - an affirmation that one can question since only Ukraine has announced its intention to submit its application for EU membership out of the whole CIS group of countries. This ambiguous position was present at different levels of Moldovan political leadership. In this respect, the prime minister, Dumitru Braghiș, told radio "Deutsche Welle" that Moldovans nor can declare that they are Europeans and want to be part of the EU, nor can they cease relations with the CIS (Flux, November 2000).

Out of all political parties, only Christian Democrat People's Party and Liberal Party have pledged for the reconsideration of Moldova's membership in the CIS as a pre-condition to its Euro-Atlantic integration. According to Christian Democrats, "our memberships of the CIS, as well as the intention of our current government to integrate Moldova into the Russia-Belarus Union are insurmountable barriers in the way of our joining the EU".<sup>85</sup> The rest of centre-right wing political parties are favouring the European integration but, at the same time, are opting for maintaining Moldova's relations with the CIS countries. As the program of the Social Democratic Alliance of Moldova states, "European Integration in no way contravenes or rule out the continuation and enhancement of relations between Moldova and the CIS states". The Social Democratic Party "in no way approves of moving our relations with the CIS partners in the background" and it is convinced that "the inefficiency of this

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<sup>85</sup> Gorda, Ș., "Political Parties between the EU and the CIS", Association for Participatory Democracy "ADEPT", 14 July 2003

Community in relation to initial expectations is largely due to the passivity of members states and lack of initiative”.<sup>86</sup> In May 2000, twenty out of twenty eight political parties and social-political movements adopted a declaration that proclaimed the European Integration “a fundamental strategic objective for the Republic of Moldova” (Flux, 10 May 2000). Christian Democrats also noted that the Parliament should denounce the Agreement regarding the creation of the CIS. Only centre-right wing parties signed the paper.

On the left wing, movement “Ravnopravie” (Equality of Rights) requires the augmentation of economic and cultural links with the CIS member states, Russia, Ukraine and Belarus counting among the first. The Party of Communists believes that in order to get closer to the EU it is enough to adjust the CIS standards to those of the EU. Simultaneously, communists speak about the accession to Russia-Belarus Union and the alignment to Russian interests, especially in the economic field. According to president Vladimir Voronin, “the European Integration remains the main important vector of Moldova’s foreign affairs, but that does not mean that Moldova will become the grave digger of the CIS” (BBC, July 2003). The Communist leader considers that the CIS should become a similar organization to the EU, based on the same principles and standards. His spokesman, Valeriu Reniță, went further in an interview with the BBC, by saying that “there is no need for Moldova to choose between two different directions since it is impossible to cease the traditional and important economic relations with Russia”. This way, the Presidency replied to the statement of Chairman of the Joint Parliamentary Cooperation Committee EU-Moldova, Jan Marinus Wiersma, according to whom, “Moldova’s presence in structures such as the CIS is incompatible with its future status of EU member state” and “the moment Moldova enters the EU it will have to say “Goodbye” to the CIS”.<sup>87</sup> Previously, the External Relations Commissioner, Chris Patten, warned that closer European integration might be hampered by simultaneous attempts to develop integration among former Soviet republics: “If we are seeing at one and the same time an attempt to develop regulatory convergence and legislative convergence within the Newly Independent States and an attempt to provide convergence with the EU’s legislation and regulatory competence, it’s a bit like trying to play three-

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Jan Marinus Wiersma declared that Moldova’s EU membership is a question of long-term perspective since the country must, first of all, clearly meet the criteria of a democratic state, BBC World Service, Romanian Section, [www.bbc.co.uk/romanian](http://www.bbc.co.uk/romanian), 12 June 2003

dimensional chess. So that is a real complication and one should not ignore it" (BBC, 9 July 2003).

These statements were the first explicit signs of the EU addressed to Moldova regarding the incompatibility between the EU and CIS membership, thus, putting upside down the assumption in Moldovan ruling circles that simultaneous integration within the two organizations is perfectly normal. From this perspective, Moldova's ambivalent foreign policy of balancing between eastern and western orientation will have to change at one point, if it wishes to become a credible partner in the front of the EU member states and EU as such. Accordingly, one can draw the conclusion that Moldova's stance in regard to the suitability of its CIS membership and integration into the Union could not be and never had been considered appropriate in the Occident, especially given the huge gap between the statements and actions of Moldovan rulers. As the Institute for Public Policy (IPP) put it, the position of balancing between the CIS and the European Union, which in fact signifies the absence of any clear political "*materially tangible*" conception in promoting relations in the frame of both organizations, is becoming more inefficient and less convincing.<sup>88</sup>

At least a half of Moldova's population is reluctant to determine its place in Europe, according to recent opinion pools. Over fifty-one per cent think that Moldova should become a member of the EU, while forty-three per cent favour the strengthening of the links with the CIS. Out of those who pledged European Integration, sixty six per cent are young people (aged between 18-29 years) and fifty-eight per cent possess a university degree. Around fifty four per cent of those who want further integration within the former Soviet space are over sixty years old and a large majority (sixty per cent) has no university education (Flux, February 2001). According to the IPP Barometer of Public Opinion released in May 2003, opinion in support of the World Bank improved, while that of the CIS worsened.<sup>89</sup> Hence, with the mobile sector of the population having mainly European aspirations and the oldest part still sharing Soviet nostalgia, the question of Moldova's European integration becomes a marking line between the past and the future of the country.

Moldova's future prospects will be countless determined by the enlargement to the East of the EU and the shifts which will occur, as a result, in the EU-Russia Federation relationship, since it will bring the notion of "Europe" unprecedented

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<sup>88</sup> "The Republic of Moldova and European Integration", Institute for Public Policy, Chişinău, 2002

<sup>89</sup> <http://www.ipp.md>

closer to Russia. Alongside Ukraine and Belarus, Moldova will create the new non-EU "Europe", which is replete with *potential* problems, from regime collapse to economic implosion, in addition to *actual*, ranging from organized crime, a frozen conflict in Moldova and endemic corruption.<sup>90</sup> As Dr M. A. Smith writes, the EU is the leading trade partner of the Russia Federation, accounting for about thirty-five per cent of Russia's trade turnover and the EU widening could increase this figure to fifty-one. The economic importance of the EU for Russia is one reason why Russia emphasises her identity as a European power and sees the EU as potentially her main partner in the international arena.<sup>91</sup>

As early as February 1999, Russian president, Boris Yeltsin claimed that "Russia can not think of herself outside Europe" and that "a single Big Europe can not be created without Russia".<sup>92</sup> This discursive identity was further reinforced by the leadership of Vladimir Putin, according to whom "Russia is an indispensable part of Europe" that must evolve together with Europe, but not opposed to it as in the Cold-War period. President Putin even argued that the CIS group of countries should elaborate a joint programme of European integration. He also declared his determination to press ahead with the creation of an internal market including the European Union as well as the former Soviet republics: "We intend to work together on establishing a single economic area within a "Greater Europe" (BASA-press, October 2002). Nevertheless, *Strategy of developing Russia-European Union relations in a medium run (2000-2010)* stipulates that a further development of the Russian-EU partnership should strengthen Russia's role as a leading force in the creation of a new system of international political and economic relations in the CIS space.<sup>93</sup> Hence, the EU's enlargement up to the borders of the former Soviet Union could increase Russian desire to establish a firmer sphere of influence in the CIS, after the Baltic States managed to escape the *Big Brother's* embrace' - an inadmissible defeat in Russia's view. Moldova, with its frozen conflict that the EU wished to get involve into, could become a field of clashes of Russian and Occident interest, a fact that may have unpredictable consequences on Moldova's state of affairs.

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<sup>90</sup> Lynch, D., "Russia faces Europe", Institute for Security Studies, Chaillot Papers, No.60, p. 82, May 2003

<sup>91</sup> Conflict Studies Research Centre, Dr Mark A Smith, "Contemporary Russian perceptions of Euro Atlanticism", February 2002

<sup>92</sup> *Diplomaticeskii Vestnik*, MID Rossiiskoi Federatii, No. 6, June, 1999

<sup>93</sup> *Diplomaticeskii Vestnik*, MID Rossiiskoi Federatii, No. 7, July 2000

Moldova's membership of the CIS is another key dimension of its Eastern vector, along with its bilateral relation with Russia and the role played by the later in the Transnistrian conflict. Yet, as far as the CIS prospective is concerned, it is crystal clear that its future lies exclusively in Russia's hands. According to IPP, Russia will preserve its presence and control over the post-Soviet area with or without the CIS, namely through bilateral and sub-regional relations, the creation of the Euro-Asian Economic Union being a case in point. The fact that Russia announced its withdrawal from the main important programmes of the CIS might be a sign that Moscow, acknowledging the unviable character of the organization,<sup>94</sup> has initiated its dismantling in an attempt to find more efficient and practical ways of cooperation.

The creation of the CIS was necessary and justified as far as it was a way to preserve the military, economic, political and informational influence of the former USSR in its former republics. Also, the CIS served as means to prevent violence escalation in the region. The goals of the Commonwealth's founders to turn it into an integration mechanism did not become reality, the CIS facing currently gradual disintegration. Although the CIS is a large regional organization, the interest of foreign investors towards it has been considerably poor (IPP, 2002). Widespread corruption, political and economic instability and a hostile environment for foreign investors – these are just some of the hallmarks that characterize every member state of the commonwealth, a fact that had badly influenced Moldova's image, to a certain extent.

Having joined the CIS, Moldova has drastically limited its possibilities to participate in EU's political and economic policies, as well as in its institutions. As a result, Moldova has been placed by the EU in the same basket with Ukraine and Belarus, and not with Baltic States to which so many Moldovans were akin when the independence was gained.

When communism collapsed and the Soviet Union imploded in 1991, many leaders in Chişinău considered that Moldova and the Baltic States started on the same footing in their affirmation as independent states and inclusion into the European family. This was in the light of a common post-war history strengthened by passionate contacts between the Moldovan and Baltic Popular Fronts and their reciprocal support in fighting for independence. As T. Venclova wrote, "Moldovans

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<sup>94</sup> The economic programs within the CIS are simply ignored by its members. Often, Russia and Ukraine had excluded Moldovan goods out of the Free-Trade provisions. The integrationist initiatives of the CIS also failed, Prohniţchi, E., Prohniţchi, V., "Analysis on Moldova's European Integration prospects", Institute for Public Policy, p. 47, <http://www.ipp.md>, April 2002

were regarded as allies in the common cause of liberation from the Russian yoke.”<sup>95</sup> However, it has not worked out like that and Moldova lags far behind in its European integration, while the EU summit in Copenhagen in late 2002 confirmed that the Baltic States would form part of the first-wave of the EU enlargement in 2004. The reasons for this can be found in the clash of history and culture on the territories of these countries, but more importantly was their modern politics and diplomacy.

On Moldova’s domestic level, the first thing that strikes an observer is the incompetence of an obsolete political class – few have proper qualifications and up-to-date knowledge and experience, compared to Baltic politicians that enjoyed a qualified assistance of a very strong Diaspora and formed themselves as specialists outside their countries. Moreover, the political leaders who came to power in Moldova were and still are closely linked to Russia due to their past as Soviet bureaucrats. Unlike the Baltic States, Moldova could not resist the sort of Russian-inspired secessionist movements seen in the region after the collapse of the Soviet Union. More importantly, while the Baltic States went for a complete rupture with the past, Moldova signed up to the CIS programs, remaining thus a satellite of Moscow’s orbit.

A feeling of frustration prevails in Chişinău given the fact that the European Union treats the Republic of Moldova in the light of its relations with Russia. Some views compare this attitude with Europe’s indifference to Moldova displayed before World War II. As O. Ungureanu put it, “when taking into consideration the fact that over ten years after the proclamation of independence Russian troops are still being stationed on Moldovan territory, while they have been already withdrawn from the territories of the Baltic countries a long time ago, it is hard to overthrow the allegation that Europe disregards the Republic of Moldova.”<sup>96</sup>

*Does Moldova’s Eastern orientation inhibit its European aspirations?*

*The short answer is “Yes”.*

Moldova’s Eastern orientation is anchored in many more and even more powerful factors compared to its Western vector. Moldova’s bilateral relations with Russia are much stronger than the ones with its neighboring countries – Ukraine and Romania, although with the latter Moldova shares common history, language and

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<sup>95</sup> Venclova, T., “A fifth year of Lithuania Independence: Lithuania 1922 and 1994”, East European Politics and Societies, University of California Press, Vol. 9, no. 2, Spring 1995

culture. Unlike Ukraine and Romania, the Russian Federation has a considerable impact on Chişinău's domestic affairs thanks to its leverage on the political leaders and its crucial place in Moldovan economics. In addition, Russia is the indisputable leader of the settlement process in the Transnistrian crisis, while the European Union and the OSCE have failed to pursue the interests of the European community after the civil war erupted on the left bank of Nistru River in 1992. As a result, the presence of the 14<sup>th</sup> Russian Army on Moldova's territory has severely undermined its independence, as it has constituted a tool for Russian direct political pressure.

Transnistria was also an instrument of "creating an incentive" for Moldova's participation in CIS programs given Russia's ability to provoke internal separatist movements as means to undermine the independence of the former Soviet periphery. The fact that Russia has recently rejected the implication of the EU in Transnistria reveals that Moscow is not yet ready to accept European presence and influence in the former Soviet Union (except Baltic States) that has been declared an exclusive zone of Russian interests. This zone of influence, also known as the "near abroad", covers all the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and is artificially maintained by Russia, given its interests in the region. In other words, as the IPP wrote, the CIS is the creature of Russian and pro-Russian elites and political circles that are still influenced by the imperial geopolitical and geo-economic chimeras.<sup>97</sup> Moldova's entrance into the CIS was a result of confused political identity of its leading class that fought for a niche in a region it was familiar with, failing thus in engaging irreversibly Moldova on its road "back to Europe".

The CIS is an outdated organization that many member states try to replace by bilateral agreements or by sub-regional organizations. After more than a decade of its existence, it is clear that the expectations of those who favored Moldova's integration into this regional structure turned out to be exaggerated and even wrong. The situation of the Baltic states is a case in point – they have consciously rejected the invitation to join Russian "initiative" and are forming at the moment the first wave of the EU eastward enlargement (accordingly having a good record of economic reforms), in contrast to all other CIS member states, whose area of foreign economic relations have worsened during these years.

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<sup>96</sup> Ungureanu, O., "The Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe and the prospect of the inclusion of the Republic of Moldova", South-East Europe Review, Quarterly of the Hans-Böckler-Foundation, p. 129-139, Issue 04/2000

<sup>97</sup> "The Republic of Moldova and European Integration", Institute for Public Policy, Chişinău, 2002

Moldova does not need the CIS, since this is not a viable tool for promoting economic integration (Chişinău's main important goal), especially that the bilateral relationship with Russia is the one that counts in its Eastern orientation. On the other hand, it is now clear that Moldova will have to choose between the CIS or European Integration at a stage. However, an eventual denunciation by Moldova of its quality of CIS member will be perceived as an anti-Russian act since it will bring about its moving-off or even complete leave out of Russia's "near abroad" – a fact that Moscow is not keen to accept at all, although it has announced its wish for the region to become more integrated within the European system. Hence, one can notice Russia's duplicity in foreign affairs: while Moscow is withdrawing from the main important conventions and agreements of the CIS, it does not wish the other republics to leave some of the community's programmes because that will run counter to its influence in the region. Moldova will have to bear in mind its economic, energetic and political dependence on Russia and the unpredictable character of the consequences that might occur if it decides to cease its CIS membership. Moldova's departure should not attract economic losses since the economic agreements are not being fulfilled; yet economic sanctions might be run by Russia in its attempt to hinder an eventual decision in this respect.

Given the fact that the CIS countries are still important for Moldova's economy and that the prospect of EU membership (including the opening of the Union markets through a Free Trade Agreement) is still a long journey, authorities in Chişinău should start a gradual re-orientation towards the European Union since it will find solutions to its problems in Brussels rather than within the CIS in the long term.



## CONCLUSIONS

The foreign policy exercised by the Republic of Moldova after its independence denoted a conceptual indecision of political leaders regarding the prospects of the country and a failure to determine a clear strategy of Moldova's anchorage in a system that would have created favourable external circumstances for its successful transition and reformation. In contrast to East-Central European countries and the Baltic States, which declared NATO and EU membership to be their primary foreign-policy objective, Moldova hesitated in sending clear messages regarding her European aspirations to the Western capitals of the European Union and other big players in the international arena, such as the United States. Also, Romanian diplomacy failed to outline to the inexperienced and new political elites of Chişinău the objective of European Integration as being the optimal way for the establishment of a modern and prosperous state. As a result, Moldova failed to gain the support of the European and international community for a future membership of the Union. Accordingly, Moldova did not benefit from a massive financial assistance for its economic and political restructuring, it being included in the TACIS aid programme of the EU, rather than the PHARE programme as in the case of the East-Central countries. The choice to join the Commonwealth of Independent States drove the country away from the processes of European Integration. This CIS membership did

not serve as an incentive for Moldova's democratic development the same way in which the prospect of EU membership did in relation to its applicants from CEEC and the Baltic region.

Moldova's capacity to outline its foreign-policy priorities was restrained and undermined by the two problems that marked its independence – the conflict in the breakaway region of Transnistria and Russian military presence on its territory with its huge stockpiles of munitions. By and large, the region was de-facto extirpated from the rest of the country after the 1992 war in which the separatist administration of Tiraspol enjoyed unconditional support from Moscow. A decade after the eruption of the conflict it has become clear that the current negotiators' format is unable and rather unwilling to solve the crisis, and that only the involvement of other external factors, such as the European Union, could contribute to a viable solution of the conflict. The separatist conflict in Transnistria is formally an internal problem of the Republic of Moldova since the internationally recognized central government does not control a part of its territory. However, in my opinion, the conflict has a geopolitical and international nature, given the intervention of the Russian Army which aims to preserve the influence of the Russian Federation in the region (a fact acknowledged by high level politicians in Moscow) and the uninterrupted political, financial, diplomatic, military and technical support given to the Tiraspol leaders by the Russian authorities.

The issue of European integration and EU membership as a strategic objective for Moldova's foreign affairs became an increasingly frequent occurrence only in the late 1990s when the pro-European and reformist government of Ion Sturza was installed. Before and after that time, Moldova exercised an unsteady and confused foreign policy and EU-Moldova relations developed slowly. In my view, Moldova might be characterized by identity schizophrenia, politically speaking, since it pledges for simultaneous political and economic integration within both the European and the Euro-Asiatic space, one having its capital in Brussels and the other in Moscow. This has complicated the situation especially since the discourse of "common values" between the two communities has been replaced with the one of "economic pragmatism", thus emphasising the non-European character of the Moscow-led community from a political and conceptual perspective.

European rhetoric in high-level politics of the Republic of Moldova became less visible, authorities in Chişinău being seriously constrained by Moscow's interests and

leverage in the region. Moldova does not yet have European political elites capable of representing a viable alternative and opposition to the Communist Party and other left-wing forces which favour the Eastern vector of external relations. The lack of continuity and consequence in the policy of European integration, as well as the inexistence of a coordinated structure of activities in this field, have led to a situation in which a large part of the population is ambiguous about the meaning of EU membership and the advantages which European community integration might bring. Hence, Moldovan society cannot properly evaluate the need to support reforms, even if they are painful, in order to achieve fully-fledged membership of the European Union. I think that Moldova will have to make a choice at a certain point between the EU and the Eastern orientation (by which I mean the CIS), since the Eastern orientation inhibits Moldova's European aims. If it chooses integration into the Eastern community, Romania, as the only neighbour that is included in the eastward enlargement process of the EU, will have to serve as a locomotive for Moldova on its journey "back to Europe", the same way in which it acted successfully when Moldova declared its wish to become a member of the Stability Pact - the most important integrative process in South-Eastern Europe that left an open widow for Moldova's further European integration, its European nature and eligibility for EU membership being indirectly acknowledged.

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